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SHASTA BRUSHED ASIDE A LOT OF MOUNTAIN CREEPERS, REVEALING THE MOUTH OF A CAVERN.
A CRY OF ASTONISHMENT CAME FROM DANDY DAVE.

Dandy Dave of Shasta;

OR,

The 'Frisco Flash o' Lightning.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "BILL BRAVO," "CAPTAIN BULLET,"
"KIT HAREFOOT," "GOLD TRIGGER," "NICK
O' THE NIGHT," "NED TEMPLE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SKELETON HORSEMAN.

BOWIE CITY was the capital of Grizzly Gulch, and Grizzly Gulch is in the middle of the great Shasta gold country.

There may be many such mining-towns or camps in California, but none with such a history as that which clings to the memory of Bowie—as it was called for short—for there lived and died the most daring men of the land of gold.

The sun sinking slowly behind the lofty cone of Mount Shasta one summer day in the year just passed, threw his beams down Bowie's one street, and revealed a number of dark-shirted men in front of a large two-story cabin, which went by the name of the Nugget Hotel.

The day was warm, and the men had plenty of time on their hands.

Without a solitary exception these fellows were stalwart and dark-skinned, and carried boldly upon their persons the deadly revolvers and dirks of the far West.

The entire population of the place seemed to compose the group, but not a female figure was visible. Bowie was a tigers' den.

The cause of the gathering in front of the Nugget, could have been found in a bit of paper which fluttered on a stately tree before the "hotel." It had been placed there during the past night, and a hundred times through the day it had been read, cursed and stared at by the denizens of Bowie.

"It's a gag o' some kind, boys," suddenly exclaimed one of the handsomest and best built men in the crowd. "It bears the imprint ov lunacy. Thar isn't a sane word in it. You kin watch fur the crack brain ef you want ter, but I'm goin' below fur a spell."

"An' I'm goin' ter watch," was a positive rejoinder.

The first speaker whirled suddenly upon the positive man and looked him in the eye.

"What d'ye think it means, Shasta?" he asked.

"I don't know exactly, but stayin' hyar will find out."

"I know what ails ye," and Shasta felt the speaker's fingers on his arm. "Come with me a minute."

Side by side the two men walked from the crowd and proceeded down the street to a certain cabin which they entered.

"Ef you go on this way a month longer, Shasta, ye'll be crazy—crazy as Wild Noll up the mountain."

"Goin' on how, Yuba?"

"Continually talkin' about Flash o' Lightning bein' alive."

Shasta said nothing for a moment, but it was plainly to be seen that he did not agree with his companion on the mental prospects that confronted him.

"You must quit talkin' nonsense," continued Yuba Sam. "You've read that notice fifty times to-day, and every time you've given Flash o' Lightning credit fur writin' it. Kin the dead write, Shasta? When did a skeleton pen a paper like thet? Tell me when, er keep yer mouth shut furever."

Shasta was a nervous man of six and thirty, one of the oddest characters of the Gulch. He had restless gray eyes and long slender hands with fingers that a strangler would have coveted.

"The dead can't write; ye're right thar, Yuba," he said, "neither kin a skeleton hold a pen, but—"

A contemptuous smile began to form at the corners of Yuba Sam's mouth; it was enough to interrupt Shasta.

"Why don't ye go on? Don't be afraid ov me."

Shasta swallowed and seemed to gain courage.

"I hev a right to my opinion," he said rather resentfully. "You fellers b'lieve *him* dead an' mebbe ye hev a right to, fur ye wur thar. I only know what I hev seen, Yuba."

"A skeleton ridin' a hoss over thar Lone Injun Trail?"

"I saw it!"

Yuba Sam looked at his comrade a minute without speaking. This time Shasta returned the look with interest.

"Ye're gittin' worse every day," suddenly broke forth Yuba. "Why, what little mind ye've got left won't last yer till ther cap'n comes back. We'll have to build a pen fur ye next week, Shasta, but ther boys won't let yer hurt yerself when you get real mad."

"Thar!" and Shasta's eyes appeared to flash. "The man ov Bowie what lays hands on me an' talks 'pen' will turn his toes to the next sun! Yes, I saw a skeleton ridin' a hoss over the Lone Injun Trail—a skeleton, Yuba. Thar! make the most ov that. I'm goin' back to ther boys."

Shasta stepped from the shanty undetained. Yuba Sam made a motion to stop him, but suddenly changed his mind and burst into a loud, boisterous laugh.

"Let 'im laugh. I know what I saw," said Shasta, as he hurried toward the crowd which still confronted the Nugget.

He kept on until he could look over the shoulders ahead and read the sentences on the paper on the tree. He was not the only citizen of Bowie who had read them fifty times, but this time, more than usual excited, he read half aloud as follows:

"MEN OF GRIZZLY:—

"To-morrow at four o'clock, P. M., Death and his pale horse will pass through Bowie. He will be on time. Stand in front of the Nugget and get a good view of him. He has come into the Shasta country to stay!"

This was the notice which Yuba Sam had

pronounced the work of a madman or fool. It certainly did not bear the workmanship of a mind any too sane.

"It's gittin' nigh onto four now," said one of the men. "Let's stay hyar till the time hez passed, jest to test ther notis."

"Stay we will!" was the response, and the crowd began to arrange itself directly in front of the Nugget Hotel. Curiosity and unbelief were visible on the countenances of every one but Shasta. He looked at his comrades with a self-satisfied air which grew into a triumph before five minutes had passed away.

"Which way will the fool come?" was the prevailing question. "Ef from below, he'll run ag'in' Yuba, ef from above, he may stumble onto ther cap'n."

Ten minutes of rough jokes, loud laughter and oaths passed, and the gold hands of Puma Dick's watch were about to proclaim the appointed hour.

"Whar ar' ye, Shasta?" called out several. "Yer skeleton even doesn't come. Whar's the bones thet rode over the Lone Injun Trail the other night?"

"Thar he comes!"

Instantly Shasta's answer was echoed by a dozen voices, and the men of Bowie glanced over Shasta's arm to descry the figure of a large gray horse which was entering the town at its western extremity.

Sounds were suddenly hushed. Four o'clock in Grizzly Gulch was an hour of shadow, the sun, hidden by the matted foliage on Shasta, no longer threw his beams down the street; but the advancing horse was distinctly visible.

As the men started, the beast changed his slow trot to a gallop, and came straight on.

All at once those furthest from the hotel shrunk against their companions in the rear, and pressed them against the logs.

"Who sez I didn't see anything the other night?" cried Shasta, with triumph. "Thar's Death an' his pale hoss, an' thar ain't a man in Bowie brave enough to stop the animile; no, nor draw a pistol on his pard."

It was true.

On came the horse ridden by a real skeleton. Not an ounce of flesh covered the bones which were as white as the snows of the Sierras. One of the skeleton hands held the reins, the fleshless fingers of the other clutched a cocked revolver! With head erect and his bony feet rattling in the Mexican stirrups, the terrible rider sat his steed with the grace of a caval-ryman.

It was a picture horrible enough to frighten the bravest men. Shasta, who had not been taken unawares, felt a nameless terror creep to his heart.

The Skeleton Rider passed within a few feet of the speechless group, but not a man stirred. No one bounded forward to check the horse's speed, the laugh, so boisterous a moment before, was now as silent as the grave.

Looking straight ahead, as it were, but in fact the sockets of the Skeleton Horseman were sightless, the terror passed on. His back was turned on the men of Bowie, and he was leaving them without a motion, without a sign.

"Ef thet isn't Death yer pistols will shatter

him," suddenly cried Shasta. "Why don't ye shoot, men of Bowie?"

The response was the drawing of a dozen revolvers, and the owners of the weapons leaped forward with oaths and cries.

Up went the deadly weapons, and twelve reports rung through the town.

But the Skeleton Rider did not reel. Instead, as Shasta afterward declared, he straightened into an extra inch of stature, and sent back a hollow laugh.

Nobody heard the cackinnation but the man with the gray eyes.

"Shoot ag'in!" he cried to the exasperated twelve. "Empty yer revolvers among his ribs, an' let 'im carry off ther compliments of Grizzly Gulch."

A fierce fusilade by men who never missed a living target was the result of Shasta's suggestion, but Death and his pale horse went on.

"Read thet paper in the light ov what ye've jest seen," exclaimed the excited Shasta, as he darted forward and called everybody's attention to the document that fluttered on the tree. "Dwell on ther last words ez yer reload yer weapons. The *thing* what is passed through Bowie hez come to ther Shasta kentry to stay. Thet *thing* is Death!"

Shasta had mounted a huge boulder which rested at the foot of the tree, and his finger almost touched the paper as he faced the crowd and spoke.

"We kin clean 'im out!" exclaimed a desperate-looking man, whose face was disfigured by a long crimson scar, which ran across his right cheek. "Thar's some trick in ther hull bizness! Death can't fight Grizzly Gulch and win!"

"Thet's brave lingo, Red Scar," said Shasta.

"It's ther truth. I say thet Death *can't* fight Grizzly an' come out on top. Who sez ther same?"

A loud unanimous "I!" was the response, and a rush was made for the tree.

Shasta would have been dragged from the boulder if he had not vacated of his own accord, and a moment later twenty dirks had pierced the paper and were sticking in the tree!

"Thar's flesh an' blood behind that skeleton," murmured Shasta, as he regarded this demonstration of madness. "Yuba war right when he said thet a lot ov bones can't shoot, but muscle an' brain kin. Thar's gospel in every line ov the paper they hev stabbed with the'r bowies. Death hez come to Grizzly Gulch to stay."

Was Shasta right?

Let the following chapters of our romance say.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUEEN OF BOWIE.

"SHASTA, ar' ye thar?"

These words were spoken at the door of one of the shanties of Bowie, an hour after night had thrown her sable mantle over Grizzly Gulch and its inhabitants.

In response to the question, the figure of Shasta appeared at the threshold and confronted a man of his own age, five-and-thirty, or thereabouts.

"You haven't been asleep, Shasta! I kin see thet by yer eyes," continued the late caller.

"Death an' his pale crittur hev been afore 'em ever since they passed through ther Gulch."

"What ef they hev, Perfection? They hev'n't been absent from yer thoughts all ther time."

Shasta's visitor smiled.

"Mebbe not, pard, but I'm hyar on other bizness. The cap'n's come."

Shasta seemed to spring clear of the ground.

"He must hev sneaked inter Bowie!" he exclaimed. "I've been wide awake ever since four o'clock, an' my shanty-door hez been open, but I've heard nuthin'. When did he come?"

"He's been hyar thirty minutes."

"Who came with 'im?"

"The person he went after—the future Queen ov Bowie."

"How does she look, Perfection?"

"I didn't get more'n a glimpse of 'er. She's a beauty, though, I kin tell ye thet; but she's a child, Shasta—nothin' but a child. She's got the blackest eyes you ever saw in a woman's head, an' when I first sot my peepers on 'er, I said to myself: 'R'ile 'er, an' she'll shoot.' I want yer to go down an' look at the Queen of Bowie."

During Perfection Pete's recital Shasta had recovered his composure, and leaned against the frame of his cabin door with folded arms.

"I will go an' look at the new beauty," he said, illy concealing under his voice an unnatural eagerness. "What do they call 'er?"

"Meda, er some sech name," was the answer.

"I heard the cap'n introduce her to the boys, but I didn't get a tight gripe on her name. It might be Meda, an' it might not."

By this time Shasta, the long-fingered, had left the cabin, and was hurrying toward the western end of Bowie's single street. His gray eyes emitted a dangerous gleam. Perfection Pete noticed that those famous fingers cocked the revolvers in his belt as their possessor walked on.

A visitor to the ground in front of the "Nugget" at that hour would have thought from the scene that the Skeleton Rider had already been forgotten by the occupants of Grizzly Gulch.

A full moon would have flooded the spot with light, if vast clouds had not obscured the sky. As it was, a number of lanterns, attached to adjacent trees and to the Nugget's logs, furnished all the light desired.

Shasta saw men gambling and looking on games of chance before the "hotel." Bowie was seeing flush times, and betting was lively. The skeleton's warning, still transfixed with knives, adhered to the tree; but Shasta did not give it more than one glance. His eyes sought another object.

"I see neither the cap'n nor the Queen o' Bowie," he said, in a disappointed tone, as he turned to Perfection Pete, who had kept a short distance behind him.

"Mebbe he's taken her home."

"I'll inquire inter thet," and Shasta was about to turn away when the figure of a man appeared in the doorway of the "hotel."

"Tbar's the cap'n," whispered Perfection Pete over Shasta's shoulder.

A splendid specimen of physical manhood was "the cap'n." He was tall, robustly built and handsome. Some one wishing to compli-

ment his good looks had dubbed him "Captain Apollo," and the title seemed none too appropriate. His nut-brown face was ornamented by a long mustache, and his long black hair touched his strong and faultless shoulders. A pair of searching yet wonderfully gentle eyes rendered him less leonine than he would otherwise have appeared. This man was the ruling spirit of Grizzly Gulch, the one character whose word was law to its inhabitants, and whose revolvers were the deadliest in the country of the Shasta buttes.

Shasta immediately fastened his eyes on Captain Apollo, and did not see how wickedly and keenly he himself was being eyed by Perfection Pete.

"Things ar' workin'," said Pete to himself unable to restrain his thoughts.

"Ef I'm not mistakin' the Skeleton Horseman won't do all the shootin' thet's bound ter come off in Grizzly."

For several moments Shasta eyed Captain Apollo; then he glided forward with his piercing eyes still fixed on the man in the door. Perfection Pete watched him until he dodged out of sight—disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

"Whar did ther crazy fool go?" ejaculated Pete. "He's up ter suthin', but what?"

Shasta had merely dodged behind a tree and escaped Pete's gaze. He had next glided around one corner of the hotel to present himself at a door in the rear of the structure. This door stood invitingly wide, and Shasta did not hesitate to enter.

Nobody barred his progress, but he stood for a moment in the dingy corridor with his fingers clutching the butt of a revolver which they had taken from his belt.

"I'll find 'er ef she's hyar," he said. "Ef she's in ther cap'n's cabin, he wouldn't be at the Nugget. I've some bizness with the Queen of Bowie."

He moved forward until a rough stairway rose before him; this he ascended to the floor above, for the Nugget was the only two-story house in Bowie.

Once up-stairs Shasta glided away in a certain direction, and soon reached an open door. His tread had been that of the panther, his eyes possessed the night-seeing faculty of the cat's.

The light on the outside of the hotel fell upon the one window of the room into which Shasta looked. It showed him the figure of a young girl who appeared to be contemplating the gamblers below.

"Thet's ther Queen ov Bowie," muttered Shasta to himself as he stared at the girl. "She's the prize thet ther cap'n fetched all ther way from 'Frisco. She's too young fur him, but she'd suit Dandy Dave—suit ther boy ter perfection."

Wholly unconscious of the presence of the desperado, the girl at the window continued to study the scene below. The light did not reveal her features to the watcher, but Shasta was willing to swear that she was beautiful.

Suddenly, as if goaded by some powerful impulse, Shasta bounded into the room and clutched the girl's arm.

A light cry followed, and the Queen of Bowie started back to stare into her visitor's face.

"I'm Shasta, an' ye're our future queen, accordin' ter Cap'n 'Pollo," said the man. "I knowed ye war comin' hyar long afore ye ever sot foot in Bowie. Perfection said ye war a rosebud, an' by Jericho! ye ar'. You'd suit my pard, Dandy Dave, fur he's young an' good-lookin'. You don't like ther cap'n?"

The girl did not reply. She tried to disengage herself from Shasta, but his long fingers prevented.

"Ye wasn't willin' ter come ter Bowie with him?" Shasta continued. "Thar's all ther difference in ther world 'twixt Grizzly Gulch an' 'Frisco. Ye hed friends thar, an' ye hev one hyar!"

"You?" said the girl, speaking for the first time.

"Shasta, the Fool, ez *they* call me!" answered the man with a smile. "Ye'r not satisfied hyar; ye can't be, fur Bowie isn't 'Frisco."

"I know that, but I'm here by my own choice," was the reply that startled Shasta.

"Say thet ag'in. I'm dreamin'," he said.

"I was not carried from 'Frisco by force," the girl said, measuredly. "I came hither with Captain Apollo of my own volition. I am satisfied."

"Ye're ther first lamb thet ever elected to live with a tiger—ther first dove thet I ever saw alive in an eagle's nest."

"I can't help that," was the girl's reply.

"You are wrong when you think I need help. I am not Captain Apollo's wife."

"Not yet, but—"

"I never expect to be."

"Oho!" laughed Shasta. "Ye talk jes' ez ef ye could help some things; but I'm yer friend, an' so is Dandy Dave."

"He is your friend?"

"We ar' pards. He'd suit ye, Dandy Dave would. I'll see that ye two meet when he comes back to Bowie."

"Do not put yourself to any trouble. I have told you that I am satisfied with my condition. Captain Apollo did not steal me in 'Frisco. My father consented to my trip to this region."

"Yer father?" echoed Shasta. "What does he call himself now?"

"I cannot answer any more questions," was the reply. "It might not be well for you if my guardian should come up and find you here. If I ever stand in need of your friendship, I will not hesitate to call on you."

"And on Dave too; promise me thet."

"I don't know him—"

"But he's yer friend, jes' ther same. He's a boy, but a game one. Good-by—what's yer name?"

"Medea."

"Perfection didn't miss it more'n a mile. Good-night, Meda."

Shasta was about to turn away when a loud shout from below attracted his attention.

"Jericho! look down thar, Meda!" he exclaimed. "Ther boy hez come in ahead ov time. Thet man what Red Scar's liftin' from ther hoss ar' Yuba Sam, an' the youngster held up by the Injun—he's ther little game-cock ov Shasta-land."

Medea's gaze was riveted on the scene transpiring below her quarters.

A company of six Indians had arrived before the roofless gambling den of Bowie. They were well mounted and led two extra horses. Across the saddle of one had lain, until lifted therefrom, the limp figure of an unconscious man; the second horse carried a boyish rider, who was held in the saddle by one of the Indians.

The man gave forth no signs of life, but the youth, pallid and weak, was still on this side of the dark river.

Shasta sprung away and left Medea to gaze alone on the scene. The Indians were being plied with hundreds of questions when Shasta reached the spot. He went straight to the two men who were trying to support the boy to the hotel.

"I'll take charge ov Dandy," he said.

The men looked at one another and hesitated.

"Take the boy into the Nugget!" suddenly said a voice in accents of command.

Shasta drew his revolver, and, turning half-way around, shot a resentful glance at the speaker—Captain Apollo.

"I'll take ther boy!" he repeated firmly, but with unmistakable emphasis. "I'll hev 'im, ef I've got ter shoot fur 'im!"

The youth's supporters evidently caught the menace of eye and pistol, and a moment later Shasta was carrying the boy away.

"Where's the youngster?" asked a man pushing toward the Nugget.

"Shasta's got 'im," was the answer.

Captain Apollo turned and caught the eye of the speaker, who was Shasta himself.

For a moment a collision seemed imminent, but Captain Apollo suddenly turned away and walked to the spot where Yuba Sam had been laid on the ground.

"Wiped out, cap'n!" said several men catching his eye.

What? Yuba Sam dead?

The eyes of captain Apollo fairly flashed.

"He's the first of the six," he said to himself, and then went forward to where an Indian was surrounded by a group of mad men.

"Who did this, War Robe?" he inquired.

"Couldn't my brother guess?"

"I want answer, not question. Who killed Yuba Sam?"

"Flash o' Lightnin', brother."

Captain Apollo was seen to start.

"I don't believe it!" he exclaimed. "Some crazy fool has borrowed the name and fame of our old enemy!"

CHAPTER III.

THE GRAVE IN FINIS VALLEY.

DEAD under the tree to which still adhered the Skeleton Horseman's notice lay one of the bravest spirits of Grizzly Gulch—Yuba Sam.

We have heard Captain Apollo mention him as one of "the six" against whom the vengeance of some slayer seemed to be directed. Yuba's rough companions, full of vengeful oaths, stood around the corpse, but their leader had left the crowd.

A minute later his voice surprised the girl who stood at the window over the scene.

"How do you like your introduction to Bowie?" he asked, with a laugh.

"It isn't none of the pleasantest; but it is not always thus here?"

"Of course not, Medea. The refinement of 'Frisco society does not reach the Shasta country. Men live here at the pistol's muzzle and the howie's point. Every man below would shed their heart's best blood for you."

"But it will not come to that?"

"No; why should it, girl? One of our men has been killed—shot by some devil down the Gulch. Vengeance of course will follow. There has been a terrible vendetta in this country. We thought it no longer claimed an existence; but it has broken out afresh."

"What began it?"

Medea asked this question in a tone of intense curiosity.

"I would have to take you back five years in order to tell you the whole story, and I haven't time to do that now," was the reply. "There's some love mixed up in it, and a great deal of blood. In telling the story I would have to inform you how Bowie came to be built where it now stands, and how I met the men below. If the history of the vendetta was to be published, it would read like a novel. But you will hear it all when I find time to relate it. Promise me one thing, Medea—that you will go to sleep, and not find fault with me for wishing to be with my comrades just now."

"I will go to sleep," answered the girl, glancing at the couch in one corner of the room.

"In the eyes of all below you are the Queen of Bowie. Do not forget that her citizens would die for you."

Adding a good-night to his last sentence, Captain Apollo resought the ground below, and spoke quietly and as quickly as possible to four men.

A fifth he addressed in a tone intended for many ears:

"Remember that the Queen of Bowie is sleeping overhead," he said. "She is in the hands of the men of Bowie. Woe to the hand among them that refuses her protection, and to the eye that guards her not. She's the richest nugget in the Shasta district; and the man who insults her will have to fight me, tied arm to arm, and at the toothpick's point!"

"She's our queen an' we'll stan' by 'er, cap'n!" was the response from several quarters.

Five minutes afterward, Captain Apollo and four men were leaving Bowie at its eastern extremity. They were well mounted on strong-limbed horses, and were armed to the teeth.

The night was dark, but the five seemed to possess the eyes of owls, for they kept their steeds in the narrow trail, and made good headway. Not a word was spoken until Captain Apollo drew rein and halted the men that rode behind him.

"Boys," he said, "do you know where you are?"

For a moment there was no response; the men seemed to be getting their bearings as best they could.

"Ain't we in Finis Valley, cap'n?" came a voice through the gloom to the desperado's ears,

"We ar' nowheres else, Lige. I brought you hither to investigate."

"Thet's what I've been thinkin'. Shasta ought ter be with us."

"We don't want such a ghost-seeking fool in Finis Valley while we ar' conducting our investigation," snapped Captain Apollo. "Shasta had better leave the country for his health. He talks too often and sees too much."

A rough chuckle that echoed weirdly around the group replied to the leader's words, and all dismounted.

A lucifer flashed like a glow-worm in the gloom, and ignited a small torch which Captain Apollo had brought from Bowie. The party had reached one of those wildly romantic valleys, which are scattered over Northern California. As far upward as the light extended the perpendicular walls of verdureless rocks were visible; the basin-like valley appeared to be completely hemmed in by cliffs utterly inaccessible.

"The valley hasn't changed since we finished the vendetta here," resumed Captain Apollo, advancing toward the foot of one of the walls with his torch.

There was no response. The men who trod at his heels carried cocked revolvers in their hands.

"Here's the spot." And with this designation the leader of the five halted and revealed a heap of small rocks, by swinging his torch near the ground.

"They've not been disturbed, cap'n," said one of the men, as all pressed forward. "Shasta an' War Robe ar' ez crazy ez loons. Bet yer boots thet Flash o' Lightning rots under them stones."

"We are here to test the matter, boys, I want no guess-work. Five years ago we cornered our enemy in this basin, and, as we thought, finished the struggle and made ourselves masters of Grizzly Gulch. After the battle we buried him under those very stones, and rode off with our dead. Shasta has seen a skeleton riding over the Lone Indian Trail, and one went through Bowie to-day; and War Robe swears that Yuba Sam dropped before Flash o' Lightning's revolver. I want to be satisfied. I am here to prove a lie or discover the truth."

Captain Apollo's men fell to at once, and the stone-heap was speedily demolished.

"Now fur the bones, cap'n!"

A spade, brought from Bowie, was soon at work, and Captain Apollo leaned forward and watched with intense eagerness the opening being made.

"Hello!" fell from his lips, as the implement struck something that resisted.

"Flash o' Lightnin'! He's occupyin' the same old claim, cap'n," exclaimed one of the men. "By Jericho! we've struck it rich, jes' ez I thought we would when Dick threwed up the first shovelful. 'Pay dirt,' sez I, an' pay dirt it is."

"Go on," said Captain Apollo to the man in the grave. "Bones tell the truth."

Down went the spade again, to be stopped by the unseen object which resisted before, but this time when it was withdrawn for a fresh plunge

into the soil, something was found to adhere to it, and the torch revealed a board.

Instinctively the desperadoes of Bowie exchanged glances.

"We didn't give Flash o' Lightnin' a coffin, cap'n?"

"No. We hadn't any to give our comrades."

"Then how did thet board—"

Captain Apollo's hand jerked the piece of wood from the spade, and the next moment he was examining it critically in the light of his flambeau.

The board, which was about ten by sixteen inches, exhibited but few signs of decay. Some earth adhered to it, but the bronze hand of Bowie's king rubbed it off, and left the two surfaces comparatively clean.

"Thar's nothin' writ on thet board, be thar, cap'n?" asked a man, when he saw his leader staring at what must be an inscription or something of the sort.

For several minutes Captain Apollo kept on like a person trying to decipher an old inscription in an uncertain light.

How eagerly his followers were regarding him, he did not look around to see. In the terrible silence that overhung the scene, he might have heard the beating of their hearts.

"Thunders!" he suddenly exclaimed and in a voice that made his men recoil. "Shasta has told the truth and War Robe hasn't lied. Flash o' Lightning isn't here, boys."

"Not hyar, cap'n?" in chorus echoed the startled four. "What does thet board say?"

"This; listen with all your might, and never forget one word, one letter of the inscription, '*This grave is empty! Death has yielded to justice! Vengeance!*' Boys, the hand what cut these words on the board we buried in this grave five years ago, and then named this spot Finis Valley, because we thought we had finished the vendetta here."

The four stared at the board on which the torchlight fell. They saw the rude but startling inscription which the point of some knife had made, but all did not believe.

"It's a lie, cap'n—a lie in spite ov thet board!" flashed one as he snatched the spade from the hands which had just wielded it.

Captain Apollo smiled as the desperado went to work. The spade met with no resistance, but the digger did not stop until a grave large and deep enough to receive a human being yawned in Finis Valley.

"I give up, cap'n," said the digger, desisting at last. "Flash o' Lightnin' isn't hyar!"

"Yuba Sam could answer thet question ef he hed thet use ov his tongue."

"That's solid truth!" said a clear voice, which seemed to descend from some point overhead.

A triumphant laugh—not boisterous nor long, but still triumphant—supplemented the words which had startled Captain Apollo and his men.

"I know you!" exclaimed the leader of the grave-despoilers. "Flash o' Lightning, we are ready to meet you. Are you coming down?"

"To fight all of you?"

"No, to fight Captain Apollo."

"How?"

"Wrist to wrist! My men will stand back.

It shall be a fair fight. The grave has been dug for one of us. Flash o' Lightning, you dare not come down!"

"I will be there!"

The voice ceased in a manner which indicated that the speaker had vacated his position.

Captain Apollo looked at his men.

"It's a boss trap, an' thet fool ar' walkin' straight inter it," laughed Juan Dick.

"What's a trap?" demanded the desperado king.

"Why thet one we'll spring on the chap we buried hyar five year ago when he comes in sight. We'll shoot straight this time, cap'n, an' thar'll not be any more resurrection in Finis Valley!"

The sound of footsteps fell on the ears of all when Juan finished. The four men raised their revolvers, and turned toward the noise.

"It is my duel!" shot Captain Apollo into their faces as he seized Juan Dick's arm. "Flash o' Lightning is coming to fight me, not you. I'll kill the Bowiete that raised his hand against an old foe without my consent."

The look that accompanied these words caused every revolver to fall, and the next instant the figure that had been advancing was seen by all.

An athletic young man, with flashing eyes, and long hair, not unlike Captain Apollo's was the sole survivor on one side of the red vendetta of other years.

He held in his right hand the long-bladed bowie of the gold camps.

"I am here, captain," he said in a clear voice as he halted in front of the men of Bowie, and bared his left wrist. "You are right-handed, so am I. Now let one of your men fasten us together."

In less than a minute, as it seemed, Captain Apollo's left wrist was lashed to Flash o' Lightning's, and the two men clutched their bowie-knives with desperate resolution, and waited for the signal.

Juan Dick held the torch over this scene.

CHAPTER IV.

NOOSE AND REVOLVER.

"What's thet, War Robe? Say it ag'in. Yer don't mean that Dandy may hev shot Yuba Sam?"

The stalwart Indian faced the speaker, and repeated the startling declaration he had just made.

"How does that strike yer, boys?" exclaimed the white. "I always said that thet young kid war no good, and now War Robe sez he may hev fixed Yuba. Thar never war any love 'twixt the two, an' then Dandy's pard—Shasta—ain't thet right stripe?"

"Ye've struck pay dirt now, Ned!" was the response from several throats. "Them two cronies hev no bizness in Bowie nohow. War Robe more than suspects Dandy, but he doesn't like to be positive. An' ef thet boy wiped Yuba out, ye kin bet yer eyes thet Shasta's behind thet whole bizness."

These words were spoken while Captain Apollo and his four were solving the secret of the grave in Finis Valley.

The bar of the Nugget Hotel had furnished

whisky to the little band of Indians who had fetched Yuba Sam and Dandy Dave, the youth, back to Bowie. To the crowd gathered in the uncouth bar-room, War Robe had told a story which did not correspond with his former expressed opinion of Yuba Sam's death. The Indian now said that, while traversing a gloomy mountain defile, he heard two revolver shots which, blending together, almost seemed one; that, hastening forward, he saw Dandy Dave on the ground under his horse's feet, while Yuba was on the point of falling from his steed.

Why, then, had he assured Captain Apollo that Flash o' Lightning had fired the deadly shots? Simply because he did not want to see Dandy Dave torn to pieces by the tigers of Bowie. Now the excitement had somewhat cooled; the boy was conscious, and could answer in his own defense.

The white occupants of the California bar-room did not note the expression of the wily Blackfoot while he spun his narrative. There was in his eyes a gleam of tigerish vindictiveness which became subdued when he mentioned Yuba Sam, but flashed with tenfold intensity as he spoke of the boy.

"I've heard enough!" cried Nevada Ned, facing the crowd. "Ther boy is ther Jonah ov Bowie, an' Shasta ther gourd thet protects him. Flash o' Lightnin' hez a graveyard ov his own in Finis Valley. Thar ought ter be rope-stretchin' in Grizzly afore the cap'n comes back! Ther next thing we know, Shasta an' Dandy 'll plot ag'in' the queen. What ther boy can't think ov, Shasta will."

"Loud cries of madness greeted the desperado's speech, and the crowd surged toward the door.

"Death to ther two pards!" "Ropes fur Shasta an' his kid!" rose on every hand.

"Don't be fools!" suddenly cried a coarse voice, and the giant form of Perfection Pete—the man who had informed Shasta of Medea's arrival at Bowie—appeared in the doorway. "Don't ye know thet Shasta kin handle a revolver like a devil—thet Dandy Dave kin hold two out an' hit two centers at once? Ther boy hain't hurt half ez bad as he 'peared ter be. I've jes' come from Shasta's shanty. He's settin' on a stool tellin' how Flash o' Lightnin' dropped Yuba an' him at ther same time—"

"Thet story won't go down, Perfection," was the interruption. "War Robe gives ther hull thing away. Shasta an' ther kid hev been playin' a deep game, but they've struck a chimney at last—a chimney, by Jericho!"

Pete did not stir.

"Ef ye must hev ther pards, why don't ye separate 'em?" he continued. "Git Shasta to come hyar; git 'im away from Dandy, anyway."

Pete's suggestion was favorably received by the mob. It no longer surged toward the door, but stooped to deliberate.

"Dandy can shoot," said several. "He's amazin' handy with the trigger. Pete, can't you separate 'em?"

"I might," was the response.

"Try it. Bring Shasta down hyar, without his shooters, ef ye kin."

"I can't do thet; Shasta's no fool."

"Bring 'im with 'em, then. What's one man ag'in' forty?"

Perfection Pete left the Nugget and hastened toward the cabin to which Shasta had borne the youth, wounded and faint.

"Things is workin'," smiled the messenger to himself, "ez sure ez death Dandy Dave an' Meda will meet ef the thing ain't nipped now. Let 'em hang Shasta first; ther boy 'll soon foller, fur ez Ruby Rob sez, 'what's one ag'in' forty?'"

The door of Shasta's home stood more than ajar; it was open, and Perfection Pete saw Dandy Dave and his friend by the light of the candle stuck into a rough block.

"Could ye come down to ther Nugget a minute, Shasta?" said Pete, halting at the entrance. "War Robe's goin' ter stan' treat, an' wants all ov us thar."

Shasta glanced at the boy before he attempted to reply.

"Go, Shasta," said Dandy Dave. "I'll keep house till you come back. I owe War Robe a good deal. I might have died where he found me if he had not come up. Go and drink the Blackfoot's health for me."

"By Jehosaphat, I'll do it," exclaimed Shasta, springing up. "Come, Perfection. You'll drink fur Dandy with me."

Pete glanced at Shasta's belt and saw the weapons of death ready for use therein. The twain left the cabin watched by the boy, whose eyes followed with gracefulness the form of the one friend he had in the Shasta country.

Nothing indicated a conspiracy as the victim entered the bar-room.

"Hyar he is! hyar's Shasta!"

"I'm hyar in the flesh," replied the doomed man to his seemingly enthusiastic greeting.

An instant later those behind him pushed forward, and before a thought of treachery could form in his mind, his revolvers were torn from his belt, and the arms of men, his equals in strength, pinioned his to his sides.

Shasta could not speak for a moment. Blank astonishment filled his eyes.

"It war fair an' squar'!" he flashed sarcastically. "Now carry out the rest ov ther programme, an' do it afore Dandy Dave hears ov it. Ye've wanted my blood a long time, because some ov ye hate ther kid. But what ar' ye goin' ter do with him?"

"Give 'im an air dance, mebbe," came over the crowd from some one on the outer circle. "We ar' goin' to crush both Jonah an' his gourd."

Shasta was hustled from the hotel to the lighted ground in front of it, and a rope, already prepared, was thrown over his head.

Just above the notice of the Skeleton Rider's coming to Bowie a strong limb projected from the body of the tree. Under it had been placed a wooden box about two feet high. Shasta mounted it without urging.

"Quick!" cried a man who sprung to the side of the leader of the mob. "Dandy Dave ain't in ther shanty. We can't find ther kid anywhere."

"By Jericho! hyar's Dandy!" exclaimed Nevada Ned, to the consternation of all, and

the figure of the youth was seen not twenty yards away.

He tottered as he came forward, weakened by his wound. Shasta uttered a cry of horror.

"He's out ov his head! Men ov Bowie, ye ar' not goin' ter riddle a boy!" he exclaimed.

At one and the same moment the roughs of Grizzly seemed to note the youth's helplessness. He carried no weapons in his hands, but was advancing upon the mob with almost childish confidence.

As he reached the edge of the crowd he was instantly seized.

The next moment Shasta was pulled from the box and Dandy Dave was forced to take his place. The rope was taken from the man's neck and coiled round the boy's.

All this in less than a minute's time.

"What are they doing this for, Shasta?" asked the youth of his friend and protector.

"You killed Yuba Sam!" cried several voices from the crowd.

"That's a lie!" came down from the wooden box. "War Robe knows better than that."

"He says you did."

Dandy Dave's eyes wandered over the mob in search of the Blackfoot, but, before he found the savage, impatient voices were hurrying up the lynching.

"Pull 'im up!" said Nevada Ned, the master of ceremonies.

A last look passed between Shasta and the boy, the noose grew tighter about his throat; he was leaving the box!

At that critical moment the sudden shattering of window-glass startled all, and the next instant the sharp detonation of a revolver was heard, and the main man at the rope staggered away with a bullet in his brain.

Half-way out of one of the upper windows of the "Nugget," leaned the figure of the Girl Queen of Bowie, and the revolver clutched in her right hand told from whence had come the death-shot.

"Unnoose your victim, men of Shasta!" came over the menacing weapon. "You are brutes, not human beings. Lift the boy down, and liberate him or I will sever the ties that bind some of you to life. If I am Queen of Bowie, I propose to rule here."

The mob recoiled from the leveled revolver, and the dangerous eyes that looked down upon the lynching.

CHAPTER V.

THE DAGGERED HEARTS.

DANDY DAVE, the almost victim of the lynchers' cord, cast a grateful glance at Medea as he stepped from the box. Their eyes met for the first time, and for a moment only.

Shasta was still held by the men who had spared him that he might witness the death of his young *protege*. They did not like to relinquish him.

"They will hang Shasta!" said the boy to himself. "Without my weapons I can lend him no aid. He would have died for me. By Heaven! they shall not separate us now!"

Did Medea catch these thoughts as they flashed across Dandy Dave's brain? If not, why did she send these words down her pistol-barrel;

"Release the man called Shasta. Let him account for his deeds to Captain Apollo."

There was no real menace in these words, but they were obeyed without a grumble of dissent.

"Three cheers fur the Queen ov Bowie!" exclaimed Perfection Pete, the last man in all that crowd from whom such words were expected. "We kin tie to her, men ov Grizzly. She's the boss gal ov these parts—the ro e what we kin sw'ar by an' win. Give 'er the bip, hip—now!"

A moment later—such is human nature in the Wild West—three tremendous cheers were given by the mob still covered by Medea's revolver.

Under the tree lay the corpse of the miner slain by the Queen of Bowie, and from the hangman's limb dangled an empty noose.

Shasta and his young friend walked away. Dave had to lean on the strong arm of his companion. The boy's face was very white.

When they reached Shasta's cabin, they found the candle left behind burned almost to its wooden socket. The ruddy flame threw a light over the rough table, but went no further.

"Somebody's been hyar, Dandy?" exclaimed Shasta, as he sprung over the threshold, and called the youth's attention to a spectacle significant enough to make the bravest quail.

Yes, somebody had visited the cabin during the twain's absence, for in the center of the table was sticking a huge horn-handled bowie, whose point was imbedded in the wood. This was not all; the glittering blade held to the table two heart-shaped pieces of paper. The knife had been driven through both by a blow that would have sent it to any living heart. Dandy Dave glanced from the sight to Shasta, who had not stopped until he could lay his hand on the hilt of the bowie.

The perforator of the hearts had left no message. His act was warning enough.

"Thet means us, Dandy!" said the long-fingered rough, turning abruptly upon his startled comrade. "Thet knife sez, 'Go er git tber full length ov me.' What say ye, pard?"

A flash of defiance lit up the youth's eyes as Shasta finished.

"I'm for remaining!" he cried. "It is fifty against two, Shasta, but we might as well fight it out here as elsewhere. I'm not afraid of that threat. Other hearts than ours may bleed. I'm a boy, but I don't run. I vote to stay."

"Carried unanimously," said Shasta. "We've jes' a free vote an' we'll give ther men ov Bowie a fair count."

As he spoke he drew the warning bowie from the table and removed the hearts which had been roughly cut from thick paper with a knife, and by a hand not used to that kind of work.

Dandy Dave had cast his wearied body upon the three-legged stool which stood invitingly handy, and was listening with interest to his companion. Dark-shirted and rough-featured Shasta was a man whose friendship could not be correctly valued, and while Dandy gazed at him, his thoughts flew back to the time and place of their first meeting.

He recalled with a vividness that sent a shudder and a chill creeping through his frame, the terrible night five years before when he was the

only living occupant of a certain mining-camp in the depths of the snowy Sierra. Hemmed in by winter and heaps of freezing white, all the rest had perished, and he was passing into that delusive sleep which always ends in death. He recalled, too, the thousand stings that darted like electric needles through his frame, and his first glimpse of the face from which he had since been rarely separated.

From beyond the camp rescue had come—rescue in the form of a man who had learned that, somewhere or other, a campful of miners were freezing and starving to death. Shasta had baffled snow and cold to save men of whom he had never heard; he had reached the camp in time to fan into a flame the spark of life flickering in the breast of the last survivor—a boy whose fortunes were henceforth to be united to his own.

Dandy Dave thought of all this as he looked up from the stool into Shasta's face.

If the old fellow had proposed an attack upon the forty men in front of the 'Nugget,' he would have grasped his revolvers and marched at his side.

"I owe you a life, Shasta!" he cried, springing up and laying his hand on his preserver's arm. "Wherever you lead, I will follow."

"Don't I know that? Wait a minute."

Shasta stepped to the door which stood slightly ajar, and leaned out into the night. The dark street of Bowie seemed deserted; but the voices of men some distance away fell upon his ears.

"They hev'n't gone ter bed yet," were the words he sent over his shoulder to the breathless boy. "Mebbe they're waitin' fur ther cap'n."

"Where is he, Shasta?"

"Diggin' up ther hull ov Finis Valley to see ef I hev'n't lied," was the reply.

A moment afterward Shasta turned quietly to Dandy Dave.

"Come hyar."

The boy went forward.

"Can't ye hear a step, Dandy?"

After listening at the door for a second, the youth answered in the affirmative.

"It's goin' to stop hyar," said Shasta, noiselessly cocking his revolvers. Dandy Dave did the same.

The ears of men inured to danger become wonderfully acute. The footfall approaching gave forth but little more noise than the tread of a fawn, yet Shasta and his *protege* heard it.

On, on it came straight toward the cabin, right up to the muzzles of the deadliest revolvers in Bowie.

The waiting pair had stepped aside; their eyes were fixed on the opening to which the feeble glare of the candle extended.

All at once a figure, then a face appeared to their vision, and the pistols that instantly covered the latter were lowered with ejaculations of astonishment.

"Queen Meda, by Jericho!" gasped Shasta.

It was the Girl Queen of Bowie, and Dandy Dave, glancing down her faultless figure, saw that she carried in her white right hand a cocked revolver whose silver handle bore Captain Apollo's monogram in gold.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DUEL IN FINIS VALLEY.

"Ar' ye ready?" asked Juan Dick, who held the torch over the two men facing one another in Finis Valley.

Flash o' Lightning's reply was an affirmative look, but "Ready!" dropped from Captain Apollo's lips.

"Then go at it, an' may the winnin' man be able ter plant the other."

For a second after the signal, the men seemed loth to begin the fight; but all at once Captain Apollo lunged at his adversary's heart only to find himself adroitly foiled by the quick eye and quicker arm of Flash o' Lightning.

The two men fought with bated breath and compressed lips.

All at once there was dealt a blow for which there seemed no parry. It was Captain Apollo's favorite stroke. Down came the glittering knife to within a few inches of Flash o' Lightning's breast, when it darted aside and shot a lightning-like thrust under his arm.

Even that blow failed. Captain Apollo was thrown almost off his feet by the failure of his favorite stroke, and before he could recover, his enemy's knife dealt what appeared a killing blow.

Captain Apollo swung half-way round with an agonizing cry to his band.

An instant later, separated from his enemy by a rapid blow of the bloody bowie, the leading desperado of Grizzly Gulch was reeling away. The four men leaped forward, but Flash o' Lightning met them with two revolvers drawn so suddenly that they instinctively recoiled.

"Take your captain home and do what you can for him!" passed over the leveled weapons to their ears. "I haven't killed him. I didn't want to finish him here nor yet. He shall be the last of his band. I have sworn it, and I shall keep my oath. There were six of you this morning; to-night there are but five. Yuba Sam tempted me. I didn't give the dog a chance for his life. You know what he did that night in Finis Valley. Take Captain Apollo home and let the new Queen of Bowie dress his wound."

Juan Dick and his companions listened amazed. The torch burning on the ground between them and Flash o' Lightning showed them a calm face and outstretched arms that did not quaver.

"Aren't you going?" cried the victor, after a moment of impatient waiting. "If you prefer Finis Valley to Grizzly, I can accommodate you. Like that wonderful boy-citizen of Bowie, I can hit two centers at once."

"In a moment, cap'n," said Juan Dick. "We ar' curious to know one thing, an' thet is, how you come to arter we planted ye five years ago."

The corners of Flash o' Lightning's mouth became wreathed in a faint smile, and a twinkle appeared in his deep eyes.

"Never mind that information, boys," he said. "You'd sooner have it, though, than save Captain Apollo, I see. He might bleed to death."

"Let the story go. We'll take care ov ther cap'n!"

Almost imperceptibly the form of Flash o' Lightning began to fade from the desperadoes' eyes, and it suddenly sprung across the boundary of light, and disappeared among the shadows of Finis Valley.

"Give 'im a volley, hit or miss!" exclaimed one of the four as he shot toward the spot where their enemy had disappeared.

"An' die with cold lead in yer brain-pans!" and the hand of Juan Dick clutched the wrist of the maddened man and held him back.

The four now turned their attention to Captain Apollo, who had shown no signs of life since his fall.

Juan Dick and Utah Phil bore Captain Apollo to the horses and held him across the saddle of his steed until everything was in readiness for the start back to Bowie.

"Sw'ar over ther cap'n afore we go, boys, thet we will make Flash o' Lightnin' give two drops ov blood fur each one he's shed to-night!" shouted Juan Dick lifting his arm.

"Two drops?" flashed Utah Phil contemptuously. "Ar' ye a fool, Juan? I'll not sw'ar on less than fifty!"

"Fifty, then; but sw'ar!"

The four men leaned forward on their horses, and clasped hands over the body of their unconscious leader.

The next moment the five steeds started off in a gallop, Juan Dick's giant hand holding Captain Apollo on his horse.

As if to show them the road to Bowie, the clouds above suddenly parted, and the rim of a summer moon became visible. Five minutes later the whole disk of the planet was unobscured. Then came a sudden "Halt!" and the four drew rein.

"Look yonder!" spoke Utah Phil, in a whisper, as he pointed ahead. "Thar's the chap what rode through Bowie jes' afore sundown."

The party was about to emerge from a mountain gulch, whose walls were not unlike the perpendicular sides of Finis Valley. The moonlight silvered a spot thirty feet ahead, and showed them a skeleton seated bolt upright on a white horse!

The "Halt" had fallen from Juan Dick's lips.

"Nothin' but bones!" said one of the men. "I'll drop the hoss."

The sharp report of a revolver rung out on the night air, as the rough finished, and the white steed, instead of staggering under the shot, plunged forward with his grisly rider.

"Heavens!" gasped Juan Dick, withdrawing his hand from Captain Apollo, as he recoiled. "Them ar' livin' bones! Git out ov ther demon's way."

The horses of the four seemed to share their masters' fright and started back.

The white steed and his rider dashed through their ranks in the twinkling of an eye. The roughs did not recover until the sound of hoofs far down the road they had just traversed told them that the Skeleton Horseman was hurrying on.

"I smelled brimstone as he went by," gasped the first man, who broke the silence.

"He didn't hev it in his pockets. I'll go yer ten ounces on thet, Wildcat," and Utah Phil

laughed at his witticism, as his comrades gathered up the reins, which had fallen from their unnerved hands.

"It's no laughin' matter," growled Juan Dick. "Boys, I think I know thet skeleton."

"Wal?"

"Them's Flash o' Lightnin's bones—"

"He can't hev two sets, ye fool!" interrupted Utah. "A boneless arm can't drive a knife into a human bein' ez deep ez he druv his'n into Cap'n 'Pollo, ter-night. It ar' a mystery, pards, ther deepest I ever struck; but I say thet when we git to ther end ov it, we'll find Flash o' Lightnin' thar."

"Ef we ever see ther end."

"Yer oath!—hev ye furgotten it a'ready?"

Juan Dick's eyes fell beneath Utah's piercing look. He glanced from under his long lashes at Captain Apollo, and raised his gaze for a moment upon his figure.

What caused the strange light that flashed suddenly in Dick's evil orbs as he looked?

"I didn't take much notice ov ther gal," he murmured, "but from what I saw ov 'er she's a beauty. Queen ov Bowie, eh? Ef ther cap'n should pass in his checks, she'd fall to somebody. Why not to me?"

Juan Dick repeated the question.

"I'll play fur her!" he continued, answering himself. "I'm a hoss when I go in on my muscle. An' ef I take a notion ter be King of Bowie an' win ther 'Frisco angel, ye kin bet yer boots thet I'll git thar!"

From that moment until the cavalcade began to enter the capital city of Grizzly Gulch, Juan Dick never removed his eyes from Captain Apollo, nor had the evil envious gleam deserted them for a minute.

"I've made up my mind," he said finally. "My plans will meet with opposition, but I'll git thar! I'm a hoss an' a devil, an' nobody knows it better nor Cap'n 'Pollo."

"What war ye sayin', Juan?" said a voice at his elbow.

Juan Dick turned with a start.

He had unconsciously spoken aloud.

"I said jes' what ye're thinkin', Utah—thet ther cap'n 'll prove a hoss an' a devil to Flash o' Lightnin' when he gits well ag'in."

Utah Phil appeared satisfied, but Juan Dick did not see the watchful glance shot at him a moment later.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOUNDED KING OF BOWIE.

THE long eventful night was departing when four rough, dark-shirted men carried an apparently inanimate figure into one of the cabins of Bowie City.

Captain Apollo had recovered consciousness, and smiled when Utah Phil assured him that Flash o' Lightning's bowie had entered no vital part of his frame.

The news of the duel spread rapidly over Bowie, and the cabin was soon besieged by a mob of bronze men who were not so noisy as the would-be lynchers of the two friends. The giant figure of Ruby Rob was on guard at the door, and the only man in Bowie who made any pretensions to surgery was attending to Captain Apollo's wound.

Of course the handsome desperado was soon made acquainted with the thrilling scenes which had transpired in the Gulch during his absence. A frown of displeasure appeared on his face when he learned that Shasta and Dandy Dave had escaped the fury of the mob, and his eyes beamed with admiration when the narrator referred to Medea's courage.

"She's more the Queen ov Bowie than ever, cap'n! Thar's a bushel ov grit in that gal. We all liked the pard she wiped out, but we like her because she kin shoot."

Captain Apollo caught the speaker's sleeve, and tried to draw him down to the spot he occupied.

"Did *they* meet after it was all over?" he asked in a low but eager voice.

"I think not, cap'n. Dandy Dave looked up ter see whar the shot came from—thet war all. Him an' Shasta went off, then."

The King of Bowie looked relieved. He seemed to fear that Medea and the boy had met, and exchanged more than glances—words.

The crowd before the cabin would not be comforted until Captain Apollo, summoning all his strength, rose and showed them his face at the door.

Then a wild cheer rent the air.

"I've tussled with death before, boys," he said, smiling grimly. "This ain't more than a scratch. Flash o' Lightning is alive. There's no use to disguise that fact. A part of the red vendetta will have to be fought over; but the men who met him five years ago in Finis Valley will not bungle the job a second time."

"Ye kin draw on the Bank ov Bowie, cap'n, an' ev'ry draft will be honored!" was the enthusiastic answer. "We're ready ter cash 'em in any funds ye name—bowies er revolvers."

Captain Apollo knew this, and returned thanks to the men who surged toward the Nugget to drink his health.

"Did you send for Medea, Ruby?" asked the captain.

"She's hyar now."

A strange gleam lit up the questioner's eyes. He threw himself on the cot in a reclining position and watched the door.

Half a minute later the figure of a young girl appeared on the threshold, and then entered the cabin.

"Here I am, Medea," said Captain Apollo, smiling. "I'm down tor a time. Flash o' Lightning and I had a tussle in Finis Valley—but you know all about it already."

"I have heard something, but I want you to tell me everything," answered Medea. "You are not badly hurt?"

"A scratch—a little blood drawn," and having said this, Captain Apollo proceeded with his narrative of the duel in the valley.

The Girl Queen of Bowie listened with a good deal of interest, and did not once interrupt the narrator.

"I thought this old enemy was dead," were her first words after the story.

"So did I. If he was, Medea, I wouldn't be Oregon Jim's patient at this moment. But what did you do last night?"

Medea started, and some color left her face, but she did not hesitate to reply.

"A mob dragged two of your people under a noose, and would have hanged one—a boy—if I had not interfered. I could not stand at the window and watch such a cowardly deed. I broke the glass and shot to save the youth."

"And killed a man?"

"Fate directed my bullet to his brain."

"It was fortune in one sense, Medea. That shot made you Queen of Bowie. The miners of Grizzly Gulch would now go through thick and thin for you—not exactly because you rescued the boy, but because you have nerve and know how to handle the revolver. The young chap thanked you, of course?"

The piercing eyes of Captain Apollo were fixed upon the girl when he put this question, and quickly captured the hesitancy that followed.

"He would be an ingrate if he had not thanked you," he went on; "but don't you think, Medea, that he deserved a little neck-lengthening for shooting Yuba Sam?"

"He did not do that."

"Ah!"

"War Robe was drunk when he made that accusation."

"Where is the Indian now?"

"He left with his braves just before daylight."

Captain Apollo smiled to himself for a second.

"What does the boy say about the charge?" he asked.

"He denies it, and Shasta stands by him."

"That's natural. They ought to stand together."

There was a sign of rising rage in the speaker's tone.

"Who shot Dandy Dave, then?"

"He cannot tell."

To Medea's astonishment, Captain Apollo broke out into a strange laugh.

"By Jove! this would be a good field for a 'Frisco detective," he exclaimed. "Medea, I don't blame you for believing all this stuff. You'll know something by and by. You needn't go back to the Nugget for the present. Yonder's your room," and Captain Apollo pointed to a door that led into the one other apartment of the cabin.

The girl glanced curiously at the door.

"Yes, you can go and inspect it," said the man on the cot.

Medea rose and opened the portal. She stood on the threshold of a small room which contained something that seemed entirely out of place in Grizzly Gulch—a bed and dressing stand. One window let the pure morning light into the place, and showed the Queen of Bowie her future palace.

Captain Apollo watched her from his cot, while she stood in the doorway and inspected the place.

"You'll have better than that one of these days," he said. "Bowie's queen is fitted to fill any station. When you go back to 'Frisco—"

Medea interrupted her guardian by turning with an ejaculation of joy.

"What did I say that made you start?" asked Captain Apollo.

The girl's face crimsoned,

"You said I was going back to 'Frisco."

"So you are, but not to-day, nor to-morrow! When you go back you'll move into better quarters than these—that is, if you trust in Captain Apollo. You had enemies in 'Frisco, Medea. We have plotters here. I am satisfied of this after what happened last night."

There was no reply. The Queen of Bowie stood over Captain Apollo in a vain attempt to ferret out the hidden meaning of his last sentence. He watched her for awhile, and was on the eve of speaking again, when the loud exclamation of Ruby Rob the loungee at the cabin door was heard:

"Cap'n, ther boys ar' surroundin' Shasta's cabin. They're goin' to wipe ther two pards out!" he said.

A cry broke from Medea's lips.

"He did not keep his promise!" she exclaimed. "He would rather stay here and die than go away and live."

The look that Captain Apollo gave her seemed to freeze her blood.

It said:

"Traitor! you love the boy whose life you saved last night. You have told him to fly for his life."

Then he spoke to Ruby Rob, who was waiting for orders at the door.

"Let the boys go on," he said. "By Heaven! the hand of Captain Apollo shall not keep them from crushing the two vipers that infest Grizzly Gulch!"

Medea shot him a look of anger. He replied with one of triumph.

CHAPTER VIII.

TUMBLER.

FEAR and anxiety were reflected in the girl's eyes when Captain Apollo went to the door to get a glimpse of the bloodthirsty mob advancing upon Shasta's cabin.

"I'll let them do it if they will!" he muttered to himself. "The two pards must be crushed, and the sooner the better. Medea loves the boy. I have discovered this already. I did not bring her from 'Frisco to lose her in this manner. There's too much at stake in the game I'm playing."

"Thar they go, cap'n," said Ruby Rob to the wounded desperado. "Saltpeter won't save 'em this time. The pards hev to pass in their chips."

How Captain Apollo's eyes sparkled while he listened to the guard's words! He evidently thought of the beautiful girl in his rear—the new and dauntless Queen of Bowie; but he did not see the flashes of fire which were then lighting up her eyes.

Silently—for a herd of tigers make no noise when advancing upon a lot of selected victims—the men of Bowie, fired with the liquid poison dealt over the bar of the "Nugget" at "a quarter a drink," approached the log castle owned by Shasta, and shared with the youth whose life his heroism had saved.

Captain Apollo followed the stealthy, determined mob with eager eye.

All at once he heard a voice behind him, and turned.

"You are going to give your tigers free rein!" were the words that assailed him.

The speaker was Medea.

Never before had she appeared so lovely to Bowie's king.

Drawn to her full height, another inch seemed to have been added to her stature. Her face was white, and her eyes fairly blazed.

She waited impatiently for his reply.

"The boss girl in California!" said Ruby Rob admiringly under his breath, as he fixed his eyes on Captain Apollo, eager to see what he would do.

"Are you going to call them off?" demanded Medea who could and did glance at the mob from her position.

"Don't get flurried, my child," he said tauntingly. "Let the men of Bowie give their enemies eye for eye. Why should you interfere?"

"Murder is going to be committed."

"Was it never done before? Who shot a man last night?"

The Girl Queen did not quaver. "I did!" she cried. "What I did then I would repeat under similar circumstances. If you will not save Shasta and Dandy Dave—as he is called—I shall proffer my assistance."

"Beware! My pards might forget that you are Queen of Bowie."

"I will refresh their memories with the trigger!"

Medea saw no leniency, no interference in Captain Apollo's eyes. As the last words left her lips, she stepped toward the door and sprung out before the King of Bowie could interpose an arm.

"Stop her, Ruby. By Jove! the girl is mad."

Ever ready to obey his leader's commands, Ruby Rob bounded after the girl, but all at once he was brought to bay by a leveled revolver.

"You stand at the boundary line of your life!" said Medea, sternly, as she confronted the ruffian. "Another step, Ruby Rob, and I'll send you unannounced to the tribunal on high."

Captain Apollo bit his lip and sent a well-bissed curse at the fearless girl. In the ruling frenzy of the moment, he partly raised the revolver clutched in his hand, but lowered it when he saw that Medea's finger was at the trigger of her own weapon.

"Fair play is all I ask," said the girl addressing Captain Apollo as much as Ruby Rob. "If I have to fight for it in Grizzly Gulch, well and good. The battle can open now."

To this challenge there was no reply.

"Go and reap your harvest," snapped the King of Bowie, after a minute's silence. "My men have all the advantage now."

The triumphant tone in which the last sentence was spoken was unmistakable.

The Girl Queen uncovered Ruby Rob's head, and hastened in the direction taken by the mob.

Medea's gait was bound to bring her up to the mob in a short time. Its approach to Shasta's cabin was not very rapid.

Suddenly the girl left the main street, and glided on but in the rear of the cabins.

Unseen by the mob, she reached the place and entered by the rear door.

To her surprise the cabin was untenanted.

After all, Shasta and Dandy Dave had fled.

"Thank Heaven!" gasped Medea, fervently. "The men-tigers of Bowie will not find the victims they seek. What will they say when they find themselves greeted by me?"

She was soon to have her question startlingly solved.

All at once something like a log fell against the portal, and as it opened and let in a flood of daylight, Medea stepped forward.

"By thunder! ther gal ag'in!" ejaculated Perfection Pete, as he recoiled from the sight that met his astonished eyes.

A faint twinkle—one of satisfaction—relieved the sternness of Medea's eyes.

"Sold once more!" cried several of the roughs who seemed inclined to take a good-natured view of the situation. "Let's go back an' drink the Queen's health."

"Not till she tells us whar ther pards ar'!"

Medea turned quickly to the speaker. It was Red Scar, one of the four men who had accompanied Captain Apollo to Finis Valley.

"I don't know where the two friends are," she said, firmly.

"No lyin', girl," flashed Red Scar. "Ye're Queen ov Bowie an' all thet; but we kin chaw ye up in a minute."

"I haven't been here five minutes. They were gone when I came. If you want Shasta and Dandy Dave you must find them."

Medea stepped back as she finished, and the most eager spirits of the mob rushed in.

Their search did not occupy five minutes.

"They war hyar two hours ago, pards," shouted Red Scar. "They can't be far off, an' whar they ar' we'll find limbs—limbs fur the cronies what wiped out Yuba Sam."

The crowd within the hut began to retreat with the intention of hunting down Shasta and his young protegee.

"I won't give you away, girl," said a low, strange voice at Medea's ear. "I don't blame ye fur doin' ther boy a turn. Ye kin trust me. I'll back ye in anything ye undertake."

Of course the girl turned astonished upon the speaker.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I'm Juan Dick, an' when I say that I'm yer friend, ye hev a friend that always gits thar!" was the reply. "Don't tell Cap'n Apollo that I've offered ye my friendship. I'll not give ye away. You helped ther boy off cleverly, an' bet yer boots Juan Dick will not see ye touched fur doin' it. Promise me an interview, Medea. I hev suthin' of importance to say. Ez ye got to the edge ov Bowie comin' in last night, ye saw a big rock along the trail?"

Medea's eyes said "yes."

"Meet me thar jes' after dark to-night, an' ye'll hear suthin' that 'll open yer eyes."

Juan Dick's lips were trembling with the last word when the loud report of a revolver filled the cabin, and the plotting desperado reeled from Medea's side with a groan!

"Hang the blamed weapon!" cried the bronzed fellow who held a smoking revolver in

his hand. "What made the pesky thing go off, anyhow?"

Half a dozen men had rushed to Juan Dick's side, but a dozen surrounded Perfection Pete.

"I must hev cocked the pistol fur Shasta an' his pard an' furgot it," continued Pete. "Thar's a rope in Bowie strong enough for me, pards. I'll take my medicine without a crooked face; but you know that I wouldn't hev tumbled Dick fur a mountain ov gold."

No man doubted Perfection Pete's story, but the sidelong glance which he threw at the bloody face of the man he had "tumbled," might have given the lie to his last avowal.

As he left the cabin, Medea's eyes followed him in a look that might have troubled him if he could have seen it.

One thing was certain; the girl did not believe that the unexpected shot was "accidental."

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHOKE OF A LASSO.

"HYAR we ar', Dandy. I feel kind o' foolish—kinder like convertin' myself inter a kickin'-machine an' beginnin' work on my anatomy. It would hev looked more like bizness to have stayed in Bowie an' fought it out with 'em, but you couldn't resist the gal—the 'Frisco angel."

The boy who heard these words drop from Shasta's tongue turned slowly, and presented a flushed but handsome face to his companion.

"I may have promised her hastily, Shasta, but I am not going to regret that promise at this stage of the game."

"Ov course not, whether the promise oughter hev been given er not. Ef I war a young chief, them eyes an' thet voice might hev won on me, too."

"Shasta—"

"I'll stop right hyar an' let the future take care ov itself," laughed Shasta at Dandy Dave's display of confusion. "We ar' nigh four miles from Bowie—a place I thought I'd never turn my back on. Let me see exactly whar we ar'," and the bronze Shasta began a scrutiny of the rough country by which they were encompassed.

The pair had listened to Medea's pleadings for them to leave Bowie in order to avoid for the present the anger of the dark-shirted men by whom they were so cordially hated. Shasta would have stayed if the boy had not promised the young girl that they would go. The influence of a pair of matchless eyes, and the pleading tones of a silvery voice are irresistible, and the pards of Grizzly Gulch were forced to swallow the resolution just taken.

Dandy Dave's wound was by no means serious; the first weakness had passed, and he was regaining the strength needed by one in his position.

"I thought I war nigh the place!" suddenly exclaimed Shasta.

"Near what place?"

"Foller me."

Shasta started off down the mountain trail, followed eagerly by the youth, who was anxious to see the outcome of the movement.

"We go up now, little one."

The wooded slope of one of the Shasta hills rose before them, and they ascended. In an hour's ascent no great height was attained, for the trail was of the poorest kind; but the friends could look down upon the ragged rocks that formed the dark gray walls of the Gulch.

"We've reached the place. Don't ye see su'thin' strange, Dandy?"

The youth took in their surroundings with a puzzled expression of countenance, and was forced to acknowledge that he saw nothing striking excepting the wild scenery.

The next instant Shasta's arm executed a sweep to the right, and a lot of mountain creepers were brushed aside, revealing the mouth of a cavern.

A cry of astonishment burst from the throat of Dandy Dave.

"I know what ye're thinkin' about," smiled Shasta. "Ye've lived a long time in this kentry, an' never saw this hole in the ground afore. Ye've never needed it till to-day, Dandy."

"Do I need it now? Must I hide like a hunted wolf from the dark shirts of Bowie?" exclaimed the boy, with indignation.

"Thet's the policy," was the reply. "They ar' goin' to hunt you. Cap'n Apollo is back. He knows that the Gal Queen saved yer life when the rope war on yer shoulders, an' he's not so green that he cannot look ahead an' see what ar' bound ter come. This ar' my cave, Dandy. Go in an' look at the new shanty."

The boy obeyed, and the vines, pulled aside by Shasta, fell back to their places when the twain had crept into the opening.

"Nobody 'll ever look hyar fur ye," resumed the rough old fellow. "Ye want rest, anyhow, an' hyar ye kin git it. Why, ye kin sit behind ther creepers an' look out on ther world jes' ez if ye war in the old shanty at Bowie."

The boy, who was inspecting the interior of the cave, did not reply.

The cavern was small, and did not extend far into the heart of the mountain. To all appearances it had not been inhabited since the day of its accidental discovery by Shasta; there were no inscriptions on the walls and no footprints on the finely-powdered dust on the floor.

"Stay hyar till I come back. You hev yer shootin'-irons, Dandy," suddenly said Shasta to the boy.

"When will you be back?"

"Some time twixt this an' to-morrer."

Dandy Dave looked surprised, and would have remonstrated if Shasta had not clutched his arm.

"Listen ter Shasta now," he said, "an' ye'll never regret it ef things go right. They're huntin' ye down at Bowie. I know it. Go out an' meet 'em an' lose the gal; stay hyar an' hold the cards thet win."

"I'll stay."

"Thet's bizness!"

A moment later the youth was the sole occupant of the strange home on the mountain-side. He stood behind the vines watching Shasta's figure as it went toward the valley below.

Finally the comrade disappeared, and Dandy Dave withdrew from the opening. The temperature of the cavern was delightful; while a summer sun beat upon the mountain-side, the

interior of the cave was cool and invited repose. The wakefulness of the eventful night just passed and the dangers endured by the boy had told on his nature. He fell asleep on the ground just beyond the sunbeams that came into the cave through the creepers which were at one and the same time screen and door.

Nothing occurred to waken Dandy Dave. When he at last unclosed his eyes, he was surprised to discover that the sun was going down the western slope of the sky.

Shasta had not returned, and the boy went to the opening and peered through the vines. He saw nothing—not even the flitting figure of a mountain bird, and no sounds marred the quiet of the summer day.

After a brief inspection of everything in sight, Dandy Dave pushed a portion of the vines aside and stepped out.

"I'll not run off," he said to himself, with a smile. "Although I step beyond the cavern for a bit of fresh air, Shasta will find me here when he comes back."

Would he?

The next instant something touched Dandy Dave's head, and then dropped like the folds of a serpent around his neck!

The boy started back with a cry of horror and looked up.

He saw the black lariat whose captive he was, and the demoniac face of the Blackfoot at the other end.

No wonder the birds had not sung around the cave; they had been frightened away by the red tiger crouched in ambush above the vines.

A devilish smile distorted the Indian's features as the noose tightened around Dandy Dave's throat.

The boy's hands shot toward knife and pistol, but a ruthless jerk by the demon overhead carried him almost clear of the ground.

At that moment a series of yells saluted his ears, and his eyes caught sight of a number of Indians as they leaped from cover on the mountain-side.

"It is War Robe's band!" flashed through the youth's mind. "They dared not meet Shasta, so they have ambushed me. Oh, for a fair chance at t e devils with my pistols."

By this time another Indian had leaped to the assistance of the half-naked lassoer, and the two were about to draw their victim up to them at the risk of breaking his neck.

"Shasta! Shasta! help!" welled involuntarily from Dandy Dave's throat.

His hands went aloft and clutched the choking cord; he pitted his strength against that of the red-skins above, but what could he do against them?

He left the ground to continue his frantic struggles in mid-air—struggles which momentarily grew weaker.

"I am lost!" forced itself across his brain, as the yelling Indians, and the mountain bushes began to fade from sight.

Not quite lost.

All at once there rung out on the summer air the ringing reports of two revolvers, and a second later the red-skins at the lasso pitched downward like human beings thrown from a castle wall!

Dandy Dave fell back upon the ground choked almost into insensibility; every limb ached, and his neck seemed to have been lengthened a foot!

The first thought that came to him after his fall was that Shasta had come to the rescue, but the long-fingered rough was far away.

The slayer of the red lassosers was a different person from Shasta; half-hidden by pistol-smoke he occupied the spot where the two Indians had been, and was sending deadly bullets in rapid succession into the startled crowd below.

The Blackfeet stood the deadly fusilade for a moment, and then rushed away. Not a bullet had failed to take a human life; nine Indians left behind told the splendid accuracy of the shooting.

"I thought those Blackfeet were up to something mean when I saw them hide here," spoke the slayer to himself. "I didn't drop the fiends at the lariat a moment too soon, but bless me! if I had any idea they had looped a boy. He looks like the pistol phenomenon of Grizzly Gulch. By Jove! it is Dandy Dave!"

The speaker approached the spot where the youth lay.

As he stooped to inquire into his condition, the whiz of an arrow made him recoil, and a spurt of blood from his neck told how well aimed the shaft had been.

Quick as a flash the white man turned toward the spot from whence the arrow had been sent, and before the would-be killer could recover from his astonishment over his victim's escape, he fell dead over his elk-horn bow.

"I'll have peace now," smiled the slayer, as he again turned to Dandy Dave, from whose neck he immediately stripped the infernal cord. "It was a close call, boy; and my discovery of the Indians' deviltry an accident. Aha! you recognize me. Your eyes tell me so."

Dandy Dave's hand stole to his rescuer's arm.

"Do we meet for the first time or have we met before? You are Flash o' Lightning."

"That's what some people call me."

"We ought to be friends."

"Friends we are, but why did you inquire if we had met before?"

"I was shot about the same time Yuba Sam tumbled from his horse."

Flash o' Lightning's eyes flashed triumphantly at the youth's mention of Yuba Sam.

"I did not shoot you," he said. "Do you know who did?"

Dandy Dave shook his head.

"I will tell you and you may hunt him down one of these days."

The boy held his breath, so eager was he to become possessed of the secret Flash o' Lightning held.

"If you hunt him down, you will have your hands full," continued the slayer. "Juan Dick is a devil who grew his horns long before he saw Grizzly Gulch."

"I'll match him!" said the boy.

CHAPTER X.

DISMISSING A JURY.

DANDY DAVE was surprised to learn that Juan Dick had attempted his life at almost the same

instant that Yuba Sam fell before Flash o' Lightning's revolver. The boy hitherto had more than half believed that War Robe the Blackfoot had fired the shot, although Shasta inclined to the opinion that Flash o' Lightning had dropped the youth, believing that he was Yuba Sam's companion.

The mystery was obscure no longer, so far as the shooting went. Time might unearth Juan Dick's motive.

Dreading the fatal effects of Flash o' Lightning's pistol, the red ambushers of Dandy Dave had made themselves scarce, and the two whites were at liberty to extend the acquaintance so thrillingly begun.

Dandy Dave at once told Captain Apollo's old enemy that Shasta had guided him to the cave. At the mention of the friend's name, Flash o' Lightning seemed to start.

"He knows Shasta," thought Dave. "I wonder if the two are enemies?"

"I am going down to Bowie," said the slayer. "I'm tired of this warfare from bush to bush."

Dandy Dave's eyes dilated.

"They are all there," he said.

"Good! I will not have to hunt them separately."

"They will present a firm front. You do not know how the men of Bowie hate you."

"Ah!" ejaculated Flash o' Lightning, with a smile. "You cannot deter me from entering Grizzly Gulch about sundown. Six years ago I was monarch there. That was before Captain Apollo—Satan take him!—and his company of roughs came to my paradise. We were happy here—my companions and I. I saw at once that we would be compelled to fight for it, and fight we did. Five years ago Captain Apollo gave me a grave in Finis Valley—I, the last of the true owners of yon gulch of gold. But the earth gave me up, for the red feud was not to be ended thus. A half-crazy trapper of the San Juan, named Dabbling Dan, exhumed me, and ran off when I opened my eyes and stared at him. Your friend Shasta is the fellow who swears that a Skeleton Horseman rides up and down the Lone Indian Trail."

"He declares he has seen the specter," said the boy.

"So, indeed, he has. Didn't he ride through Bowie a few hours ago, and among all her brave men there was not one bold enough to clutch the white horse's bridle-rein?"

As Flash o' Lightning finished, he glanced at the sun now quite near the western horizon.

"Another hour," he said, unconsciously speaking aloud, "and I will be in the lions' den."

"Arn't you afraid to stay here? The Indians might come back."

"With these I will face them!" And the boy displayed his elegant revolvers, as deadly as those in Flash o' Lightning's belt.

"I've heard of your shooting," said the Killer, "but I never saw you at it."

"You might see me shoot if we went to Bowie together."

"No doubt of that if the tigers of Grizzly want your life."

"They want that which they shall never have!" declared the boy.

Flash o' Lightning was about to turn away, when he said:

"Have you no message to send to Bowie?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Dandy Dave, with eagerness. "Tell Medea that I am safe among the mountains."

"Medea?" was the echo.

"Ab, you do not know her; I forgot that. She is Captain Apollo's *protegee*, and Queen of Bowie. Tell her that Shasta and I are safe. But you may not get to see her."

"I will—I'll make that a point," said Flash o' Lightning. "I'll convey your message to Medea, boy, if I have to shoot my way to her ears."

"I like that kind of talk, and I do wish I was going with you. By Jove! I'll go anyhow."

"No! keep your word with Shasta."

Dandy Dave would have remonstrated and insisted on accompanying Flash o' Lightning to Bowie if his new acquaintance had not checked him by moving off.

He watched the Killer until his figure became lost to view by a bend in the mountain trail, and he was forced to go back to the cavern to keep vigils with a pair of cocked revolvers.

"Flash o' Lightning's fight is fast becoming mine," he said to himself. "I owe him a life, and Juan Dick will take him unawares if he can. By George! I wish Shasta would come."

Meanwhile the sun was going down, and the various mountain trails were darkened by shadows. Not far from the spot where Flash o' Lightning rescued Dandy Dave from the terrible Blackfoot lariat, a symmetrical steed responded to his low whistle, and a moment later the journey Bowie-ward was resumed.

At the western mouth of the Gulch proper Flash o' Lightning drew rein and listened. If the town was ahead there were no indications that it was inhabited, for no noises came down the Gulch.

"I'll go on and make my call anyhow," said the Killer. "If they are not ready to receive me, I'll leave my card and retire."

At the word "card" he glanced at the revolver clutched in his right hand.

He kept on until he entered the camp and found himself riding down the narrow street between two rows of rough log shanties—the buildings of long-established mining-towns.

Not a sign of fear was noticeable about the faultless figure well poised on the horse that carried so well the deathless rider of the Shasta country. Had he shod his steed with rubber shoes? He advanced almost silently, the horse obedient to his master's will.

All at once Flash o' Lightning started, and his eyes beamed with satisfaction.

There was a light ahead, and he presently saw a crowd of people in the open space in front of Bowie's sole hotel.

"A trial!" he exclaimed, in a subdued tone. "Whom have they dragged before court now?"

A little further on, still in the shadows beyond the boundary of the light, he drew rein and rose in his stirrups.

He could look over the heads of a portion of the crowd and down into a ring. He saw a tall, conspicuous man seated on a keg with folded

arms, and triumphantly eying those by whom he was surrounded.

"I'm byar fur a fair hearin'," suddenly exclaimed this individual, as he sprung to his feet. "Ef my pistol went off accidentally an' tumbled Juan Dick, say so, an' don't chaw leather over it. Ef I shot 'im on purpose prove it an' hang me. Did I run when my weapon went off? Warn't I holdin' it carelessly this way?" and the speaker indicated a certain manner with a large "navy." "An' hedn't I forgotten that I hed cocked it fur use on Shasta an' ther boy pard? Perfection Pete wants the charge decided one way or 'nother, an' that afore next Christmas."

He sat down and eyed the crowd again.

Flash o' Lightning could see the glitter of Perfection Pete's eyes, and the satisfied countenance which he could not conceal.

"If Juan Dick is dead, Dandy Dave will not get to settle accounts with him," the Killer murmured. "I'll wait for the decision of the court before I go on."

It was evident that Perfection's sentences had been called forth by the tardiness of a jury, which had "retired" for deliberation. At one side of the circle stood five men, who cast looks toward the prisoner while they conversed in low tones.

"Hyar they come at last!" fell from Perfection Pete's lips, as the five moved forward.

Thirty bronzed men leaned forward to hear the verdict. Flash o' Lightning put his left hand up to his ear, in order that he might not miss a word.

"Shoot 'er out," grated Perfection Pete. "I sought this trial an' I'm ready to take my medicine."

Utah Phil was the foreman of the Bowie jury. He took a step forward as Pete spoke.

"We find that Perfection's revolver went off accidentally," he said.

"Thar! I told ye so!" cried Pete. "A fair trial an' a fair verdict. Now dismiss ther jury an' drink at my expense."

"Hold!" rung out a clarion voice, and the word was succeeded by the sudden halt of a horse just beyond the circle. "I'll dismiss the jury and take charge of the foreman."

The speaker stood erect in his heavy stirrups, and at the end of each arm thrust forward was a cocked revolver.

"Flash o' Lightning!" greeted him on every side.

Revolvers were more than half-way drawn.

Perfection Pete's victory vanished from his eyes in a second.

"Draw, Utah," exclaimed the Killer. "You're the foreman of the jury and one of the doomed six. Draw! for, by the memories of the past! I'm here to kill!"

Utah Phil had recoiled, but with his hand on his revolver. The weapon leaped from his belt at Flash o' Lightning's words.

Up went the desperado's arm, and the next moment, at the loud report of a "Navy," he reeled away, shot through the breast, and was dead before he struck the ground.

"Men of Bowie, where's your captain?" cried the slayer, in the second of irresolution that followed the retributive shot. "I am here to fight

the war between us to an end. This spot shall be the Finis Valley of our last battle. Captain Apollo, come forward."

A hissed oath fell from the lips of a man who at that moment stepped from between two cabins near at hand.

"I'll try the virtue of a carbine on your skull, Flash o' Lightning!"

He put the weapon to his shoulder and pressed his right cheek to the stock.

How his eyes blazed! and how eagerly his fingers leaped to the trigger!

"Your captain's a coward!" rung out Flash o' Lightning's voice. "Tell him that I will fight him some other time."

His horse sprung forward as he finished, and Captain Apollo's carbine spoke. But he had aimed too long.

"Drop him!" yelled Perfection Pete.

Flash o' Lightning whirled in his saddle before a single weapon could cover him.

"This for the paradise you devils stole from me!" he shouted, and an instant later he was shooting into the dark-shirted tenantry of Grizzly Gulch.

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTAIN APOLLO'S NECK IN DANGER.

CAPTAIN APOLLO stood speechless and astonished, with the smoking carbine in his hand, when he discovered that he had missed his enemy; but when the death-shots of the Killer struck down man after man, he involuntarily recoiled and then fled.

He did not try to get beyond the reports of the deadly weapons. If he had looked back, he might have seen the boldest citizens of Bowie seek the Nugget for safety.

The man on horseback bore a charmed existence.

"If they don't drop him, I will next time!" grated Captain Apollo. "He fears nothing, else he had not entered Grizzly Gulch to-night. He is anxious to settle the old feud once and forever. If my carbine had not failed me I would have settled it. Where's Medea?"

Captain Apollo crossed the threshold of his cabin as he put the question to himself. The candle burning on the rough table did not reveal the girl. He went to the little room which had been assigned to her, and surveyed it for a moment.

The girl Queen of Bowie was not there.

"She hasn't followed the boy!" he exclaimed. "By Jove! I should have finished him before I went to 'Frisco after her. I might have known that the pair would meet and get sweet on each other. Captain Apollo, you haven't cut your eye-teeth yet. The boy Dandy Dave has outwitted you, and the prize worth so much has slipped through your fingers."

He stood for a moment in front of the cabin, with madness in his eyes and with clinched hands.

There was a commotion up the street to his right, but no more pistol-shots. Had the tigers of Bowie put an end to Flash o' Lightning's career, or had he ridden off with twenty dead men behind him?

It is probable that at that time these important interrogatives did not bother the King of

Bowie, for he started off in a contrary direction, as if he had suddenly thought where Medea might be found.

He went straight to Shasta's cabin—to the hut where Perfection Pete's pistol had "accidentally" shot Juan Dick. He opened the door and went in, but the room was quite dark, and the starlight that followed Captain Apollo inside revealed nothing.

His hand swept across the table which he discovered, but found no candle, therefore Captain Apollo was obliged to see with his fingers.

He began to search the shanty in the darkness.

All at once he uttered a cry and started back. Springing to the door, he held his hands close to his face and saw dark stains upon them.

"Blood!" he said. "Pete did drop Juan, but the body isn't here. Didn't Ruby Rob say that it was not to be molested till morning? I wonder who took it away?" and Captain Apollo's eyes were full of wonderment as he stared at his bloody hands and talked.

"There's some mystery here," he went on. "Perfection Pete kills Juan Dick accidentally, and Medea turns up missing. Hello! somebody's coming!"

Back across the threshold of Shasta's cabin stepped the master spirit of Bowie with a revolver in his hand. He held his breath while he waited for the arrival of the single person who was advancing, not from Flash o' Lightning's last battle-ground, but from the mountains at the other end of the camp.

"War Robe!" ejaculated the watcher, bounding from the shanty and halting in front of the tall, Indianfied figure, that recoiled at his exclamation. "You always turn up when I need you, chief."

"Good! War Robe huntin' white brother now."

"What's up?"

"Dick an' 'Frisco girl talkin' down by big stone."

No wonder that Captain Apollo recoiled with a gasp—a cry of amazement.

"Medea—Dick? Your eyes must have deceived you, War Robe."

"The eyes of the Blackfoot never lie. Will the white captain come and see?"

"Can it be that they left Juan Dick alive in this hut?" flashed across his brain. "If he does live, what business has he talking with Medea beyond the limits of Bowie? Yes, I will go and see. I will not fail as Perfection Pete did. My shot shall never be called an accidental one."

War Robe, the Blackfoot, was not asked the second time to lead the mad captain to the spot where he had seen Medea and Juan Dick.

"Down!" whispered the Indian, touching Captain Apollo's arm, when they were near the big stone, and the King of Bowie crouched with his finger at his weapon's trigger.

He saw two figures motionless beside the huge boulder known everywhere through the Shasta country; but the uncertain light did not reveal their features.

"White girl an' Dick here yet," whispered the

Blackfoot. "They no move while War Robe been gone. Kin white captain hear what they say?"

"No, but I will!"

Captain Apollo began to creep forward. War Robe was at his heels. Theirs was the noiseless gliding of a pair of serpents, or a brace of panthers.

They did not take their eyes from the two objects at the stone. War Robe had drawn his knife, and his red fingers encircled the handle.

All at once Captain Apollo dropped to the ground and turned his eyes upon the Indian.

They were not more than fifteen feet from the boulder. The King of Bowie saw the flashes that danced in War Robe's eyes; they told him that the red-skin had made a discovery similar to his own. And that was that the figures at the stone were neither Medea's nor Juan Dick's, but those of Captain Apollo's bitterest foes!

Had War Robe deceived him? No; the Indian's surprise was no less than his own; the Blackfoot had expected to find the Girl Queen and her new lover at the stone.

"What brought them hither?" whispered Captain Apollo, throwing a rapid glance at the strange figures as he spoke. "I'm glad I found them, though. War Robe, which one will you take?"

"The boy."

"And I'll settle with Shasta, curse him! They came back to the lion's den at the wrong time. I'd sooner see them than Medea, now, yes, ten times sooner."

"Is the white captain ready?"

"Yes."

A second later the Blackfoot bounded up and leaped forward like a jungle tiger. He cleared the space between Captain Apollo and the stone in the twinkling of an eye, and that before his startled companion could cover and shoot the long-fingered rough.

Captain Apollo had forgotten that War Robe was armed only with a knife, and before he could recover, he saw the Indian alight between the figures they had watched.

There were cries of sudden surprise and a boy's voice.

"War Robe, Shasta!"

Captain Apollo sprung up and saw several figures struggling in the starlight.

"I'll have a hand in that fight!" he cried. "I'll let star-beams into the boy's head, and put him forever out of my way!"

The King of Bowie went forward. He saw that War Robe was fighting Shasta and Dandy Dave with commendable courage.

"I'm here!" rung from his throat as he alighted on the ground.

"Captain Apollo!" cried Dandy Dave.

"Yes, youngster, the best hater you have in the Shasta country!"

He saw the boy try to disengage himself from the left hand of the Indian which had clutched him. Dandy Dave wanted to fight the new-comer.

The next second Captain Apollo thrust his revolver forward. It almost touched the youth's head.

"Here ends your trail!" he hissed.

The report was followed by a terrible cry.

"Heavens! the wrong person!" gasped the captain.

He stood spell-bound while the hands of his victim relaxed their gripe, and he reeled away and fell at his feet a quivering corpse!

It was War Robe instead of Dandy Dave!

Fortune and accident had preserved the youth's life, for Shasta had pushed War Robe across Captain Apollo's aim just as the fatal finger touched the trigger.

"The wrong man sure enough, cap'n!" exclaimed Shasta as he threw himself upon the shooter and wrenched the revolver from his hand.

"I guess as how we'll rake in ther stakes—Dandy an' me! Shoot 'im boy, if he stirs!"

The last words were addressed to Dandy Dave who stood before the King of Bowie now Shasta's prisoner.

"Ye'll own, cap'n, thet ther tables hev been upshot," the old miner went on, eying his captive with a merry twinkle in his eyes. "How did Flash o' Lightnin' git along in Bowie?"

"Go and see," was the brief mad answer.

"We will in a few brief minutes. Be civil, cap'n, and talk like a man of sense. Ther 'Frisco angel is a stunner an' no mistake. Old Goldbrick didn't object when you offered to bring her to Bowie, an' make 'er queen ov this death land, eh?"

Captain Apollo did not reply.

"I kin see ther old rascal counting his money an' laughin' over the success ov his plans. You wanted Meda an' he didn't, cap'n. She's Queen ov Bowie an' ye're king; but Dandy and I hold the boss hands just now. I wonder ef thar's a rope in ther old place?"

Shasta stepped aside and ran his arm into the hollow of a tree near by.

"Hyar it is," he said, withdrawing a coil of rope which he displayed to Captain Apollo's gaze. "More'n one feller hez tested ther strength ov this fishin'-line, cap'n."

"You are going to hang me, then?" said the King of Bowie.

"We hev to, cap'n. It's policy jes' now," was the answer. "Dandy and I hev to hang ye for self-protection. It's purty much dog eat dog in Grizzly at this writing—suthin' like ther survival of ther fittest, an' that's us."

Before Captain Apollo could reply, a noose already formed fell over his head; the cast had been made by Shasta who stood ten feet away.

"Whar's Meda, cap'n?" asked the boy's pard. "Ye'll die game, an' give us a fair showin' fur Bowie's Queen."

A new light beamed in the outlaw captain's eyes when he fastened them on the boy.

"You'll be cheated in the end!" he hissed. "By this time the Queen of Bowie is beyond my reach and yours."

"What! Medea isn't dead?" cried Dandy Dave.

"Go on with your hanging, Shasta," was the retort.

The cord was tossed over a limb that projected over the big boulder which Captain Apollo was commanded to mount.

Dandy Dave's revolver still covered his head, and he sullenly obeyed. Shasta's deft fingers fastened the lynchers' cord to a small tree near by, and stepped toward the victim.

"I've been at hangin's hyar afore to-night," he said, laying his hands on the stone. "Cap'n, ther rock ain't stationary by a long shot; ther boys fixed it fur hangin'-sprees more'n two years ago. All I hev to do is to kick the stone-pin out from under one side, giv' ther rock a push, an' it'll roll out from under ye. I'm goin' to do thet now. Are ye ready, cap'n?"

"Finish the game, devils!"

Shasta's foot was about to loosen the rock that held the bowlder firm, when a figure alighted behind him, and sprung from thence upon the stone.

"Shoot him, Dandy!" cried the gaunt hang-man.

But the youth, instead of obeying Shasta's command, lowered his revolver, and recoiled with an exclamation of astonishment.

On the stone beside Captain Apollo stood a young girl whose name had just fallen from the boy's lips.

"Meda, by Jericho!" echoed Shasta, and as he spoke a knife severed the rope, and the coil, nearly fatal, lay harmless on the broad shoulders of the King of Bowie.

"What d'ye mean, girl? Thet man's ther worst enemy ye ever hed," said Shasta, staring at the Girl Queen of Bowie.

"I mean that *you* shall not hang him!" was the reply. "It has been decreed that he shall not die with his neck in the noose."

Captain Apollo shot Medea a glance which was unfathomable.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAIL OF A SECRET.

If the Queen of Bowie had met Juan Dick at the big bowlder and gone off with him, why had she returned?

This mental question puzzled Captain Apollo, and the mystery did not abate while he stood on the rock and looked into Medea's eyes.

At his feet lay the stiffening figure of War Robe the Blackfoot, slain by mistake, and he himself was still menaced by the revolvers of Shasta and Dandy Dave.

"Wal, queen," said Shasta, "ef it hez been decreed that Cap'n 'Pollo warn't born to be hung, why we couldn't hev choked 'im if ye hedn't come. It war a close shave, boss, an' ye kin thank ther 'Frisco angel fur yer escape."

"I want no thanks!" spoke the girl quickly. "I did my duty—"

"Yer duty? Wal, mebbe ye did, queen; but ye're ther first person I ever run ag'in' who saved a wolf because they thought it war right."

Medea's next words were addressed to Captain Apollo.

"Let us go back to Bowie," she said.

"Agreed. Then you are not going to desert me?"

He stepped from the bowlder as he finished, and his eyes flashed as he looked at Shasta and his *protege*.

"Say it, cap'n," said the former, smiling.

"Relieve yerself afore ye go back to ther town."

"By Heaven, I will!" the desperado king exclaimed. "Others will stand on this very rock if they don't go under by another method!" and his clinched fist fell heavily upon the bowlder. "I am still Captain Bowie, the man who won this ground by hard fighting. I still command the men of Grizzly Gulch."

"Yes, them what Flash o' Lightnin' left in fightin' condition," grinned Shasta.

"Ye'd better go back ter Bowie an' count noses afore ye talk ov thet regiment ov fightin'-cocks. I fancy thet Grizzly's a graveyard to-night, cap'n. Jes' because ye buried Flash o' Lightnin' once in Finis Valley, ye mustn't think thet he doesn't know how ter handle ther drop-pers. Come, Dandy. Ef Meda ar' goin' ter tie herself to Cap'n 'Pollo, why, we needn't be so anxious to walk through ther old town."

The Girl Queen of the mining-camp heard Shasta's last words, and shot Dandy Dave a quick glance. The boy hesitated but her eyes said "Go," and he at last turned reluctantly away.

For several minutes Captain Apollo and Medea walked toward Bowie in silence. The dark eyes of the handsome desperado never left the girl, and he spoke not until the edge of the towh was reached.

"Where's Juan Dick?" he asked so abruptly that Medea started, and before she could answer he continued: "I thought he was killed in Shasta's cabin. Perfection Pete has been tried for the killing and acquitted. How is this?"

"The man was not hurt much. Pete's bullet, tearing along his cheek, knocked him senseless, and all who saw him lying in the cabin and bleeding took him for dead. If Pete had raised the revolver on a level with his eye, the ball would have crashed through Juan's brain."

"You met him at the big stone before the two pards reached the spot?"

"I did. He told me before he was shot that he had something important to communicate."

"And that was—"

"Pardon me," said the girl, lowering her gaze. "I cannot tell you now."

Captain Apollo's eyes flashed.

"Where is Juan now?"

Medea was silent.

They were in Bowie again and the girl was not urged to reply to the rough's last question.

He took her to his cabin and into the room which had been prepared for her reception.

"Remain here awhile," he said. "I am going away. Medea, things have reached a desperate stage in Bowie; but I am king here, and mean to reign! I did not steal you from 'Frisco. I asked you to come and you came."

"But you said that my life was in danger there—that there was a dark plot against it by men who knew that I stood in their path," said the girl. "I came with you to Bowie to avoid them, but are they not here as well? Why did Perfection Pete shoot Juan Dick when he saw him talking to me, and then swear that his revolver was accidentally discharged when I know that he purposely shot to kill? And what did Juan tell me to-night?"

"Yes, what did he tell you?" cried Captain Apollo, darting upon the girl and clutching her

arm. "What lies did the plotting devil coin for the purpose of turning you against me? By Heaven! you shall unmask him here—now!"

"If I want to," was the answer, and the girl wrenched herself from her persecutor's clutches. "Let me go back to 'Frisco and face my enemies if I really have any there. In a moment of fear I listened to you. I am not afraid to confront the plotters of the gold coast."

A sardonic laugh rippled through the desperado's mustache.

"The trail to 'Frisco is open for travel," he said, "but you shall not go back alone. I am going with you."

"You?—when?"

"By and by."

The girl gave him a look and turned away.

He directed his steps toward the "Nugget," the scene of Flash o' Lightning's battle with the men of Bowie.

"Hyar's Cap'n Apollo!" was the greeting he received, and a moment later he was surrounded by a score of his band.

"The devil got away," said Ruby Bob; "but we drew blood. He lay on his boss's neck an' held to ther line like grim death. Sech shootin', cap'n! It war worse than that he did in Finis Valley. Yonder ar' ther pards thet 'll never handle their droppers ag'in!"

Five minutes afterward the King of Bowie pushed open a cabin door near the western terminus of Bowie's one street.

"Who's thet?" asked a rough, grating voice in the gloom, as the clicking of a revolver-lock was distinctly heard.

"It is I, Pete!"

"Ther cap'n! By Jove! yer don't want a light ter find my wound. Jes' put yer hand in my bosom. Hyar, let me take it."

The hand of Flash o' Lightning's victim was put forward in search of Captain Apollo's wrist, but the King of Bowie, whose eyes had by this time become accustomed to the light, contrived to avoid it.

"It war a fight, cap'n—one in which yer old enemy sustained his name!" continued Pete. "He's quicker nor lightnin'. Ther court hed jes' acquitted me when he rode up an' proceeded to dismiss the jury. Utah war foreman an' he got ther first dose. I hardly know when I got mine, but I got it jes' ther same."

"Yes," said Captain Apollo, "I have heard that they acquitted you for shooting Juan Dick, but you didn't finish him."

A cry of astonishment burst from Pete's throat.

"Don't give a dyin' man taffy, cap'n," he said.

"Why should I? Juan Dick lives; he isn't badly hurt. A torn cheek is all he has."

For a moment Perfection Pete made no reply. Captain Apollo could see the workings of his countenance.

"He may win yet," he murmured, speaking his thoughts aloud. "I hed to shoot from my waist so ez not give myself away. Pete, ye're a fool! Juan ought ter win ther game."

Captain Apollo caught every word as it fell from the desperado's lips.

"Do you know what secret Juan carried?" he asked Pete,

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"How did ye discover he had one, cap'n?"

"Never mind how, Pete. I know he carries one."

"I found it out accidentally not long arter ther Queen of Bowie squatted hyar."

Captain Apollo could not repress a cry.

"It concerns Medea!" he exclaimed.

"Cap'n, help me up. I feel like livin' ag'in. Me an' Juan an' ther other devil fur it. I'm willin' ter play my hand till death rakes in ther last dust."

Spasmodically summoning all his strength the wounded Bowieite sprung up so suddenly that Captain Apollo recoiled.

"You can't walk, Pete," he exclaimed, grasping Perfection's arm.

"I'm goin' to play my hand," was the mad response. "They've called me, an' I'll answer with the pistol. Let me go, cap'n!"

The rough made a lunge toward the door which stood open, but Captain Apollo was upon him.

"You're mad! Give me Juan Dick's secret and I'll play the game you want to see through. The secret—quick! You are dying, Perfection!"

"Ye're ther boss liar ov ther Shasta country, cap'n," flashed back the desperado, as he tried to tear himself from his leader's gripe. "I've been shot afore. Ye want Juan's secret, eh?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Wal, it's a wonder ye hev'n't studied it out. Ye're sharper than Perfection, cap'n, but—"

The man caught the logs at the door and gasped.

"I'm goin' ter throw up my hand," he said, turning his eyes upon Captain Apollo. "It's ther first cold deck I ever hed sot up on me. I guess—I'll—quit—cap'n."

"The secret first."

A look was the only reply.

"Keep it, then!" grated the king of Bowie. "I'm man enough to shoot it out of all who possess it!"

Captain Apollo threw the dying man from his arms, and heard him strike against the logs in the darkness a few feet away.

The next moment he sprung from the hut to be greeted by a cutting laugh, which told him that somebody was rejoicing over his failure.

"Where are you?" he exclaimed. "I am here ready for any dog that wants to bite me. Come forward and meet Captain Apollo face to face. You're a coward, and I'm the best man in Grizzly Gulch."

Another laugh, more prolonged than the first, was the answer, and from the opposite side of the street came one sentence:

"Dead men tell no tales, cap'n."

An oath, a cry of recognition, and Captain Apollo bounded toward the unseen speaker, who was Juan Dick.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KILLER AT HOME.

It was true, as Ruby Rob informed Captain Apollo, that Flash o' Lightning had ridden from Bowie on his horse's neck.

Five minutes afterward horse and rider were

far from the spot just mentioned and on a different trail.

"Let me see where California is," said Flash o' Lightning, drawing a silver whistle from his pocket and sending a shrill sound down the road.

Within a short time the noise of hoofs was heard, and the gallop of a horse approached.

"The old fellow was waiting somewhere for us," observed the Killer, with a smile, and then a horse came in sight.

Sierra answered the whinny of the white steed. A moment later the two horses were exchanging equine greetings, and Flash o' Lightning inspected the pale steed's rider. "Inspected" him, we say, for a skeleton sat in the saddle—a skeleton grisly enough to make the warmest blood run cold. A revolver was fastened in the bony right hand, while the left clutched the reins it had no power to lift.

"You'll soon have rest, Dan," said Flash o' Lightning, addressing the ghostly horseman, "and you, California, will lose the rider you have carried so long. You two have made famous Lone Indian Trail, and not a bravo lifted his pistol when you went through Bowie according to notice."

Flash o' Lightning leaned forward and caught the white steed's bridle.

"We'll go and take a peep at the ranch," he said.

Half an hour afterward, after a smart gallop, the strange riders entered the mouth of a narrow canyon whose walls towered for a thousand feet above its bed. Strange as it may seem, the place was almost echoless. A little dim light penetrated the romantic gulch, almost as historic as Grizzly, for the place to which we have brought the reader was Flash o' Lightning's home.

To the canyon, after his rescue from a living grave in Finis Valley, he had been conducted by Dabbling Dan, the half-witted wanderer, to whom he owed his life. He had made it his headquarters since; there he recovered from the terrible wounds received in that desperate fight, and from thence had he sent the white horse and his skeleton rider to haunt the Lone Indian Trail. More than one resident of Grizzly Gulch had believed that the skeleton was the specter of the terror who had been "shot to pieces" and buried in Finis Valley; and more than one good chuckle Flash o' Lightning had had over this thought.

On the night of his dare-devil doings at Perfection Pete's trial, the Killer dismounted in the middle of the canyon and entered what appeared an open door. It was in reality nothing more than a huge fissure which extended hundreds of feet above his head. At the bottom of the wall it was wide enough to admit of the entrance of a horse and his rider, and when Flash o' Lightning had gone in, the two horses followed, one by one, and disappeared completely.

If a person could have crept in behind the last horse, he might have seen a glimmer of light far away and apparently many feet above his head. This was a torch held by Captain Apollo's enemy. He and his horses had climbed a rude, rocky stairway, and were now in a large apart-

ment, more than one hundred feet above the bed of the canyon.

This was Flash o' Lightning's abode. It had once belonged to Dabbling Dan, whose spirit might be supposed to haunt the skeleton on the gray horse. The walls were high, and of a dirty gray color. On one were chiseled many names—not less than twenty-five. They were the names of the men who had once shared with Flash o' Lightning the delights of the paradise of Grizzly Gulch. That was before Captain Apollo and his desperadoes appeared on the foreground—before the days of the red vendetta, which was the natural sequence of their appearance. That Flash o' Lightning held in reverence the memories of those men, was apparent from the manner in which he saluted the names on the wall. One by one, and sometimes by twos and threes, they died before him for right in Grizzly Gulch. He knew them all, and they had left him their avenger.

"Nine, and perhaps ten, more," he said, on the night in question, as he looked at the group of names, and taking a piece of chalk from a niche in the wall, he made nine long marks on the stone. Others were already there—marks which told that the dead were not sleeping un-avenged.

"The last mark shall be the longest," he said, surveying his work. "I can then go back to 'Frisco and hunt up Lillian. I wonder how the girl looks now? I haven't seen her for eight years. She's a young woman now, and there's something coming to her, if the money vultures haven't defrauded her out of it. I would have fetched her to Grizzly Gulch and made her Queen of Shasta, if those demons hadn't raided us. Bowie has a queen, but Lillian would have reigned over better and braver men than Medea does. Ah! she may yet be queen here, in spite of the past. Grizzly Gulch may yet be the paradise it once was, but the revolver will have to bring about the change."

The torch burned low, flickered and threatened to go out; its shadows danced on the cavern wall; the two steeds were at rest a few feet from their master.

Presently a dark head appeared above the stone stairway, then the shoulders and body of a red-skin. He crept aside, with his eyes fixed on the Killer, and another Blackfoot drew his half-naked and well-greased body into the cave. The pantomime of satisfaction and devilish triumph indulged in by the red trailers was amusing.

They were the companions of the demons who had fallen before Flash o' Lightning on the occasion of Dandy Dave's rescue from the Indian lariat.

Kill ten Indians out of a band and leave three, and the three will trail you.

The red avengers had seen Flash o' Lightning enter the canyon—a place to which they had tracked him before only to lose him somewhere between the towering walls. This time they had been more successful.

Ten were crouching just beyond the light of the lone torch, and still the Killer slept on.

Suddenly a yell shrill enough to waken the dead rung through the cavern, and the skulking fiends sprung forward.

But the sleeper rose in the twinkling of an eye, and a moment later the plagues of the Sierras were reeling from his deadly revolvers with death-cries!

Not a red hand had touched him. The yell—which the Indians could not suppress—had baffled them, and sealed the doom of more than one.

"Never shout until you have the fox!" cried Flash o' Lightning, grimly.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE 'FRISCO ROAD.

CAPTAIN APOLLO found nobody on the opposite side of the street when he reached it; the laughter had disappeared.

For a moment he stood in the starlight, chewing the cud of chagrin, and loudly cursing the man who had outwitted him.

"Juan Dick lives, and is a full-fledged enemy of mine!" he said. "He need not think that I was unable to recognize him by his laugh. His laugh was a challenge. I accept it, but in spite of him, I am going to reign in Bowie."

He went back to the cabin where he had left Medea.

"You told the truth when you said that Juan Dick still lives," he said, opening the door that led to the Girl Queen's room. "I'm on the trail of his secret, and, by Heaven—"

He paused abruptly, suddenly realizing that the girl was not before him.

He stood speechless on the threshold for a second, and during that brief period his eyes seemed sparks of fire.

"She's got 'Frisco on the brain," he hissed, in no good humor. "'Frisco and Juan Dick's secret, whatever that is."

With the last word he rushed from the cabin. This time no derisive laugh greeted him, and he saw no one until he reached the greensward in front of the Nugget.

"Cap'n," said Ruby Rob, suddenly leaving a group of men, "what's ther matter with the queen?"

Captain Apollo started.

"Has she been here?" he asked.

"Not exactly hyar, but she went by ten minutes ago, glanced at ther boys yonder, but said nothin', though she looked satisfied. Big Dan saw her. She went toward ther Twin Buttes."

"Toward 'Frisco?" exclaimed the King of Bowie. "I can trust you, Ruby?"

"Till ther last hand hez been played, cap'n."

Captain Apollo grinned his thanks, and he and Ruby Rob went off together. A few minutes later the pair left Bowie well mounted on good horses, and struck the trail indicated by the last true member of the six.

Myriads of stars lit up the azure expanse overhead, and showed Captain Apollo and his companion the trail before them.

"Ruby," said the desperado, suddenly, and in a voice that made the listener start, "what happened five years ago?"

"Where, cap'n?"

"Hyar, or in Finis Valley."

"Ob, you know jis' ez well ez I do."

"What took place to-night?"

"The chap we planted then killed nine brave boys."

"Well?"

"An' got away!"

"Leaving of the old vendetta you, Juan Dick and I."

"What ar' ye drivin' at, cap'n? Show yer hand. By Jericho! I'm all in the dark."

Captain Apollo remained silent for a moment.

"Juan's turned against me. He told the girl a secret to-night. Have you any idea what it is?"

"Nary an idea, cap'n," was the reply. "I never thought that one ov ther six would turn ag'in' ye. You would kill Juan?"

"I would, and I will!"

Ruby Rob glanced at the revolver which the speaker carried in his right hand.

"Where the girl is there is Juan Dick," continued Captain Apollo. "And they are on the 'Frisco trail. We follow to find and to kill, Ruby. Are you with your old captain?"

"Bet yer boots!"

A glow of pride animated Captain Apollo's eyes as they regarded the tall dark ruffian riding at his side, but he did not respond. The two kept on for some distance, and reached an abrupt bend in the trail.

Bowie was now two miles in their rear and no longer visible; the road was somewhat dusty, and their progress was accompanied by no sounds.

"Hist, cap'n."

The twain drew bridle, and at the same time their deadly weapons were made ready for work.

What had Ruby Rob heard?

Several moments passed away without discovery of any kind.

"What was the sound like?" ventured Captain Apollo in a whisper.

"A voice—like the queen's."

The next instant the King of Bowie dropped noiselessly to the ground, and crept down the trail. His keen eyes eagerly scrutinized every object that crossed their line of vision. They were ready to warn their possessor of any danger that might be lurking near by.

"All at once Captain Apollo stopped and he'd his breath.

"Ruby was right!" he murmured. "Medea is here."

At that moment there rose before him a figure whose well-known symmetry the starlight disclosed.

The 'Frisco angel was not more than ten feet away, and was apparently waiting for some one.

"I'll wait till Juan Dick comes up. Then I will kill two birds with one stone."

How eagerly and with what burning impatience Captain Apollo kept his eyes fixed on the prize he had lately fetched from the capital of the Golden State!

"On the trail to 'Frisco sure enough," he exclaimed while he watched; "but I'm here, my jewel—here to balk this little runaway scheme and to slay the traitor."

Suddenly the girl started at the sound of a footstep, and just as the figure of a man came in sight, the flash of a revolver blinded Captain

Apollo's eyes, and a human figure reeled toward him with a wild death-cry!

"Heavens!" gasped the King of Bowie as he recoiled with half-raised weapon, and that moment the man so suddenly shot fell at his feet.

"Hit home this time!" grated the victim of the shot.

"Somebody has saved me a bit of trigger service," hissed Captain Apollo, as he stooped with fiendish delight over the speaker.

"Ther cap'n, by Jove!"

"Yes, traitor!"

"The secret—quick!" and Captain Apollo's hand clutched the desperado's throat. "What do you know about the girl?"

"You'll find it out if you wait. Hev patience, cap'n."

"The secret, Dick, or—"

A figure landed beside Captain Apollo, and broke his threatful sentence.

"They're gittin' away with the queen, cap'n," said a voice at his shoulder. "Ye don't want ter lose Meda when Shasta an' the boy hev'er on the 'Frisco trail?"

Forgetful of Juan Dick's secret, the chief ruffian of Bowie sprung up and whirled upon Ruby Rob.

"Lose her? no!" he exclaimed. "The horses—ah! they're here! Shasta shot Juan—"

"It war ther boy-pard!" came up from the ground in bitter accents. "Didn't I wing 'im the night Flash o' Lightnin' dropped Yuba Sam, an' about ther same time. I saw what war comin' an' I fixed fur it at once. Ef ye hed tumbled Dandy Dave, cap'n, afore ye went to 'Frisco after Meda, thar'd hev been none ov this business hyar."

"But you would have plotted all the same."

"Wouldn't I? an' fur such a gold mine ez ther 'Frisco angel!"

Ruby Rob had leaped toward the horses a few feet from the spot, but Captain Apollo irritated by Juan Dick's last words was stooping again.

A quiver was passing over the stalwart figure on the ground for heart the of Juan Dick had ceased to beat.

Ruby Rob threw a look upon the corpse on the ground.

A minute afterward the twain were at the horses, and Captain Apollo had mounted when Ruby Rob startled him by springing toward the spot where Juan Dick lay.

The King of Bowie saw his companion stoop over the body and thrust his hand beneath Dick's dark shirt.

"He's feeling for something valuable," flashed across the captain's brain. "Maybe Juan Dick had reduced his secret to writing, for he could write."

As he concluded Ruby Rob rose and came back empty-handed.

"What were you looking for?" eagerly queried Captain Apollo.

"Nothin'. I war only doin' a little swearin'." And the speaker turned his face from his leader and gathered up his steed's reins.

The next second the twain moved from the spot and rode briskly forward as if Shasta and Dandy Dave with their fair companion were to be overtaken by a chase in the saddle,

A mile traveled brought them no success.

"By Jericho! ther dust will tell us suthin'," suddenly said Ruby Rob. "Hev ye a match?"

Captain Apollo replied by producing a lucifer from his pocket, and his comrade glided from the saddle.

Presently a glimmer like a fire-fly's lamp appeared above the trail, and the man on horseback saw the bronze face of Ruby Rob almost touching the dust.

All at once as the light flickered Ruby sprung up, and bounded to his leader's side:

"Nary a hoss-track, but plenty of moccasin-marks, cap'n."

"Indians?"

"Blackfeet."

"We've come too far on the trail."

At that moment the cracking of a twig was distinctly heard, and out of the darkness came the voice of an Indian.

"The pale-face who shot War Robe shall die!"

Ruby Rob instantly vaulted into his saddle.

"How does ther prospect strike ye?" he hissed into Captain Apollo's ear.

"I'm ready to prove that red dog's words a lie!"

"Not now, not now, ef ye want Medea, ther 'Frisco angel. We must git out ov this without noise. Jes' around ther bend thar ar more Injuns than ye kin count!"

CHAPTER XV.

RUBY STRIKES FOR JUAN DICK.

THE situation of the two roughs of Grizzly Gulch was far from inviting. A scowl was on Captain Apollo's face, fire in his eyes.

The Blackfeet had discovered War Robe stiff and cold on the spot where he had fallen.

"They're comin' this way, cap'n," said Ruby Rob, leading the way to one side of the trail. "Shall we let 'em go by?"

"Toward Bowie? Yes. They'll get enough of blood if they tackle the boys," was the reply. "I'm perfectly willing that they shall go there and demand the man who shot their leader."

Motionless as equestrian statues, Ruby Rob and Captain Apollo sat among the shadows of the trail, and saw fifty black figures move toward Grizzly Gulch.

"You want Captain Apollo, eh?" grated the King of Bowie. "If circumstances did not detain me here, you'd get enough of him before morning. Wait till I find Medea—then I'll turn my attention to you wolves!"

Ruby Rob watched Captain Apollo more than he did the savage prowlers moving by. He could see his leader's outlines in the dim light, for their knees almost touched, and their steeds' heads were together.

"Thar'll be sport in Bowie afore dawn," remarked Ruby. "I'd like to be thar, but ther boys kin hold their own. I'm ready fur ther other trail, cap'n. Ef we hev luck we'll find ther 'Frisco seraph, an' git back in time to help the Injuns find ther man what tumbled War Robe."

Following a trail in the night in the Shasta country is not the most encouraging of occupations, and it is no wonder that Captain Apollo and his companion should miss Medea's. The

moccasin-tracks on the trail had told them that they had advanced too far, and they were compelled to retrace their steps, not to the spot where Shasta and Dandy Dave had rescued Medea by wounding Juan Dick, but to a spot where another trail left the main one.

"We've struck pay dirt this time, pard," exclaimed Ruby Rob, looking up from the path which he had examined by the light of another lucifer.

"Hoss-tracks thet kin be felt, an' goin' toward ther Twin Buttes."

A cry of exultation broke from Captain Apollo's lips.

"To horse, Ruby! Let us make up for lost time."

A minute afterward the twain went down the new path at a good gait, Ruby Rob still watching his leader who seemed confident of gaining a victory of some kind before long.

On, on! It was an all-night ride, for the morning broke in the east, and her long arrows of light showed the two men the tall, verdureless cones of the Twin Buttes rising like giants from the valley where they stood. They rode into the wildest, yet most beautiful valley of the Shasta district and halted for a moment between the twin cones, which stood several yards apart.

Ruby Rob stood erect on his saddle and looked down the trail which they had traversed all night long.

"Nothin' ahead, cap'n," he said, settling back to see a shade of disappointment cross his leader's face.

"There must be."

"Git up an' see."

Captain Apollo rose and looked.

"I've got the best eyes, Ruby," he suddenly exclaimed. "I see something."

Ruby Rob's eyes blazed.

"By Jove! it's a horseman coming this way," Captain Apollo continued.

"No! no!" And up went Ruby again to see a moving speck far away.

Larger and larger it grew while he looked, but all at once it disappeared so suddenly that he at first believed that his eyes had deceived him.

The disappearance of the unknown irritated Captain Apollo; his uneasiness increased, and made his companion smile.

All at once Ruby Rob's clinched hand shot out from the shoulder and delivered a blow which sent the King of Bowie reeling from the saddle before he had any intimation of the stroke!

"That war for Juan Dick!" grated Ruby, as his leader struck the ground. "Ye'll never find ther 'Frisco angel, cap'n. Why didn't ye let Juan die in peace? Seven years ago ye organized yer band on this spot, an' hyar ye pass in yer checks, an' death rakes in ther last pot."

While he spoke, Ruby Rob sprung to the ground and bent over the stalwart man who had been knocked senseless by his blow.

He contemplated him with eyes burning with fiendish triumph.

"Every dog hez his day, cap'n, an' this ar' yourn!" he muttered. "I'm ther last ov ther Six—ther only living man ov all thet swore in this valley to wrest Grizzly Gulch from Flash o' Lightning an' his pards."

Ruby Rob now took from his saddle a strong black lariat, and uncoiled it as he reapproached Captain Apollo.

With smaller ropes he tied his leader's hands together, and then drew a noose over his head. His next movement was back to the horses, and one end of the black lasso was fastened to the girth of his victim's horse.

"I'm goin' to send ye through the valley at a two-forty gait," he said, addressing Captain Apollo. "Ye may find Medea in thet condition, but ye'll never wear ther diamond ye fetched from 'Frisco."

With his bowie, Ruby Rob cut a long withe and stepped forward for the purpose of sending the one steed deeper into the Valley of the Twin Buttes, with his doomed master at his heels.

Another glance at his victim, a flashing of his devilish eyes, and up went the stick.

"Hello!" came down from above, as Ruby Rob threw all his strength into his right arm. "Drop thet stick, Ruby, an' give ther cap'n another chance."

Ruby Rob wheeled and looked up.

About fifty yards away and some distance above his position, a bronze face was touching a leveled rifle, and a dark hand was at the trigger-guard.

An exclamation broke from Ruby Rob's throat.

"I can't wait all day, Ruby!" repeated the man above. "Step back, an' hold up yer hands!"

The stick dropped from the desperado's grasp, and he stepped back with the sullenness of a whipped dog.

Then the figure of the interferer came into view, and the name of "Shasta" was spoken by the baffled rough. At the same time he recalled the horseman who had just mysteriously disappeared, as we have related.

Shasta came forward, with the rifle pointed at Ruby Rob's head.

"Hevn't ye any respect fur prophecy, Rob?" queried Shasta with a grin. "Don't ye know thet ther cap'n ain't to die with a noose under his chin? Ruby, ye war temptin' fate in tryin' to circumvent prophecy."

"Prophecy be hanged, Shasta! What do you mean?"

"Cap'n 'Pollo hez an enemy who hez a right to one more tussle with 'im," was the reply.

"Flash o' Lightnin'?"

"Thet's his handle."

"Whar is he?"

"Heaven knows; but they'll meet. They're bound ter, Ruby."

Ruby Rob threw a look at his leader, who was showing signs of returning consciousness.

"We oughtn't ter be enemies, Ruby," Shasta continued. "Let us be friends ef we can't be pards."

"Agreed."

Did Captain Apollo see the bronze hands of the two men meet? If not, he certainly saw them move forward together, and halt at his side.

A look told Shasta that he had been recognized, but before Captain Apollo could speak, the long-fingered outlaw spoke:

"Ye'r' goin' with us, cap'n," he said.

"Ter ther 'Frisco angel," suggested Ruby Rob, with a grin.

"Yes, ter Meda," confirmed Shasta.

"What means this, devils?" demanded the King of Bowie. "I am knocked from my horse by Ruby Rob, and he meets another dog here. Not a step without an explanation. I'll shoot my way down the trail to the grave first."

Quick as a flash Captain Apollo's hands leaped to his belt, but weapons as deadly as his covered him in the twinkling of an eye.

"We'll take a hand in thet little game," laughed Shasta. "Cap'n, jes' now ye'd better ax no questions. Mean' Ruby hyar know what we're doin'."

"Now mount yer hoss."

Pistols menaced him to his steed, and as he mounted a new horse appeared on the trail in obedience to Shasta's whistle.

On either side of Captain Apollo sat a man in whom at one day he had put implicit trust. What were they going to do with him, now that he was their prisoner?

"For'ard!" exclaimed Shasta, as he seized the bridle of the captive's steed with his left hand, and away the horses sprung.

Under his dark mustache the King of Bowie bit his lip, and stole dark glances at his captors.

From the corners of their eyes Shasta and Ruby Rob constantly watched the rider of the middle horse. The twin cones were speedily left behind, and the trio were entering a deeper valley when the startling report of a rifle crashed through the ears of all, and Captain Apollo's horse began to sink under him.

Shasta released the bridle and started up.

"Thet bullet war intended fur ther cap'n, Ruby," he said.

"Give me a pistol and let me meet that man on equal terms!" cried Captain Apollo, pointing toward the person who sat on a handsome steed a short distance ahead. "No! you dare not! You brought me hither to have me shot down like a dog."

"I'll prove that a lie, cap'n!" said Shasta, who had just been addressed; and the next moment he thrust a cocked repeating-rifle into Captain Apollo's hands.

CHAPTER XVI.

DANDY DAVE'S METTLE.

THE derisive laugh which saluted Captain Apollo's ears after the death of Perfection Pete in the cabin—an event which the reader will readily recall fell from Juan Dick's lips. Shortly afterward he and Medea fled from Bowie to be overtaken, as has been seen, on the spot where the traitor received the ball from Dandy Dave's revolver, which stretched him mortally wounded at the King of Bowie's feet.

Fortune had not brought the two pards to the place; but agility and good judgment had. The keen eyes of Shasta had seen Juan Dick and the Girl Queen strike the famous 'Frisco trail, and by a short route and fast walking he and the youth had managed to get ahead and intercept them.

Medea was surprised to find herself confronted by Dandy Dave after the unexpected shot.

"I am your friend," the boy said in a low voice as he pressed her arm. "Shasta is with me and we are on the 'Frisco trail. Leave us if you will and go back among the tigers of Bowie; their leader and Ruby Rob are not far away. Choose quickly, 'Frisco or Bowie—liberty or slavery."

Medea's mind was made up.

"I will go with you," she said, and from that moment her fortunes were linked to Dandy Dave's.

The journey from the spot to the Valley of the Twin Buttes followed as a matter of course, for the 'Frisco trail wound through the latter. More than once during the ride the boy stole glances at the girl and noted her fair face and eager eyes.

"Ef we could fall in with Flash o' Lightning we'd put 'im on somebody's trail," suddenly remarked Shasta.

Dandy Dave saw Medea start at mention of the Killer's name.

"Utah Phil dead, Yuba Sam under ground an' Juan Dick playin' his last hand, things ar' lookin' kinder dark fur ther Six," continued Shasta. "What'll Bowie do without the cap'n? Why, ther wolves'll fall out 'mong themselves, an' War Robe's red-skins will rake in ther dust."

"But Captain Apollo still lives, Shasta," said the youth. "You overlook this important fact."

"No, Dandy; but he's doomed. He'll keep on ther 'Frisco trail until he turns his toes skyward."

The girl was silent for some time after Shasta finished, and Dandy Dave, who still watched her narrowly, was confident that she was trying to find courage to speak.

All at once she turned to Shasta.

"Would Juan Dick lie?" she said.

A wildering look was in the bronze outlaw's eyes.

"Ef yer hed been better acquainted with 'im ye wouldn't be asked thet now," he said. "He would steal hosses, shoot Injuns, an' cheat with ther pasteboards; but he wouldn't lie. Thet's his only passport to ther future. He told ye suthin', then?"

"Yes."

With the monosyllable which raised the curiosity of the two friends to a high pitch, Medea relapsed into silence, and a satisfied expression overspread her countenance.

Shasta and Dandy Dave exchanged puzzled glances, but as the girl still kept silent neither ventured to disturb her.

The ride down the 'Frisco trail was kept up until the boy noticed Medea tottering in her saddle. Overtaxed nature was asserting her sway. Instantly the friends reined in their steeds, and the gallop fell back into a walk.

"Ther 'Frisco trail is safe ahead," said Shasta, addressing the youth. "The danger rides behind us. Go on an' let the queen sleep."

The speaker halted.

"I will keep awake," said the girl, smiling, but Shasta was immovable.

A minute later her sole companion was Dandy Dave. She tried to keep awake, but her words grew incoherent, and at last failed her alto-

gether. The boy leaned over and steadied her in the saddle with his left hand, his right clutched a revolver, and thus the two waifs of the Shasta country passed over the trail that terminated in San Francisco many miles to the south.

Fairer than ever seemed Medea's face, as she slept. Her beautiful ringlets, unconfined, fell over her shoulders, and looked glossy in the starlight. More than once Dandy Dave leaned toward her with the hope that she had awakened, for he was eager to question her about something that seemed to devour him.

All at once a sound ahead startled the boy, and the horses were stopped.

Medea slept on.

Withdrawing the steadying hand, Dandy Dave slipped from his saddle and proceeded forward. He was certain that his ears had not deceived him. What if a band of Blackfeet obstructed further advance? Fire lit up the depths of the youth's eyes when he glanced back at Medea and thought of this.

Twenty steps from the girl the boy crouched and held his breath. A short distance ahead a figure darker than the sides of the rocks that rose on the left of the trail greeted his vision, and as he looked, another and another.

He did not know that he had again encountered the Indians from whose lurid the pistols of Flash o' Lightning had rescued him a few hours before—the remnant of the red band which had surprised the Killer at home, and met with a reception that cost them a number of lives.

The first figure observed by Dandy Dave was not alone, nor did it remain stationary to persuade him that his eyes were deceiving him.

"I had better go back and protect Medea," passed through his mind. "If the Indians get between us there will be hot work."

He gave the figure outlined against the rock a farewell glance, and then turned back.

At that moment a quick scream rent the air.

A bound carried the boy to the spot where he had left his companion, and as he halted between the horses an exclamation of rage and disappointment burst from his throat.

The girl was gone!

Not a red-skin appeared in sight, not a sound salute Dandy Dave's ears, and when he stepped back after this terrible discovery with a cocked revolver in each hand, he was astonished because no arrows pierced his body.

Silently and surely some prowling Indian eagle had swooped upon Medea and carried her off, and that while he was not twenty yards away.

Resolved to do something, Dandy Dave went back to the spot from which he had seen the figures on the rock. Nothing there.

"By heavens! I will solve this mystery!" he exclaimed.

He retraced his steps to the horses, which, having smelled Indians, were now restless. The trail was dusty and he knelt down. Gently moving his hand over the surface, which he had not disturbed, his delicate touch detected a number of depressions—moccasin-tracks!

"The trail!" he exclaimed, joyfully, and, starting up, he sprung away to burst into a new

unknown road which he had not perceived before.

"Sh! boy comin'!"

Dandy Dave's quick ears caught these words despite the low tones in which they were spoken.

"Yes, and death is with the boy!" he grated.

He was walking into an Indian ambush, but yet no arrows finished his career. It could not be that the captors of Medea were unarmed.

All at once six figures rose in his path—six Indians, who seemed about to rush upon him.

Dandy Dave stepped back and threw up his revolvers.

"White boy no shoot, an' live," said a voice. "Blackfeet huntin' man that killed War Robe; they goin' to kill all his friends."

"Then give Medea back!" said the boy.

"Girl came all way from 'Frisco with Captain Apollo, an' no try to get away. Then she be the great white shooter's squaw."

"A lie brought her to Bowie—a lie you can't understand!" answered the boy. "I swear to you that she is not Captain Apollo's wife—that she was flying from him to-night. He is coming hither. Give me my friend and take my back trail until you meet him."

"White boy can't make War Robe's braves believe that girl not big cap'n's squaw when she foller him from 'Frisco without tryin' to git away. Go back an' let Blackfeet keep young squaw."

"Never!" cried Dandy Dave. "I am going to put an end to this conference. I will reach Medea's side if it be but to die there. For the last time I say: 'Give her up—'"

"Go back, little shooter; or—"

The voice of the outstretched revolvers was the interruption. The Indians were so near that the fire leaping from the barrels seemed to burn their faces.

They reeled from the deadly pistols of Dandy Dave who advanced while he fired.

"Give her up or reap a harvest of death!" fell from his lips. "I am Dandy Dave, and I have shot before!"

In a minute, so rapid was his firing and so deadly the execution, he saw no enemy save those lying around him.

The echoes of his last shots came back from every side, but still not an arrow, not a lasso. Why was this?

He went further down the trail, nonplused, mystified.

"I am beaten," he at last exclaimed. "Medea has been carried off. Medea? Medea?"

A faint cry like a girl's last gasps came to his ears, and threw him forward.

Suddenly he ran against an object.

The next moment a wild cry pealed from his throat, and he held his breath while he gazed into her face for a sign of life.

"If they have killed her, may I never see 'Frisco until every red fiend has paid for this hanging with his life! Shasta will help me, but he shall not touch one of the fiends."

Dandy Dave uttered these words with an emphasis which vengeance alone can give, but the next instant he started and smiled.

The first sign of life—a gasp—had parted Queen Medea's lips.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST OF THE VENDETTA.

NOT less surprised than Captain Apollo were Shasta and Ruby Rob at sight of the man whose bullet had first brought the middle horse to the ground. The twain were falsely accused by a look from the King of Bowie, but Shasta had replied by thrusting a revolver into his hands.

"Thar now, cap'n, ye're nearly on equal terms with Flash o' Lightning," said the long-fingered rough. "Settle the old grudge between yerselves; ther time hez come."

"We're on an equal footing at last!" Flash o' Lightning exclaimed, darting a mad look at his enemy.

The revolvers almost touched as they shot forward; certain it is that sleeve touched sleeve. An instant later the reports came, and one man stood alone where two had just stood face to face.

"Now!" flashed through Ruby Rob's brain. "It is my time. I am the last of the Six. He will not spare me."

Since the commencement of the duel, his hand had touched the silvered butt of his revolver. He now drew the weapon with his eye fixed on Flash o' Lightning.

"It ar' my drop this time," broke from his eager lips.

"Liar!"

With the epithet, an arm shot upward, a shot followed, and the man that staggered past Shasta had a bullet in his head.

The eye of the slayer had been quicker than the desperado's trigger.

Calmly, but with victory in his look, Flash o' Lightning returned his revolver to his belt. He did not fear anything at Shasta's hand, for he came forward, not with unshaken tread, but staggering.

"I got it from Captain Apollo this time," he said, smiling grimly, as he addressed Shasta. "Got it somewhere in my life-box. This place will be the burial-ground of the last of the vendetta."

"It sha'n't be ef I kin help it!" exclaimed Shasta, springing to Flash o' Lightning's side.

The Killer leaned against one of the horses while Shasta inspected his wound.

"What are the prospects, doctor?" the former asked.

"Middlin' to average," was the answer.

"We'd better go to Dandy and ther gal."

"I am ready."

"Avenged at last!" Flash o' Lightning said.

"Ruby Rob had to be the last to die in spite of my vow."

Not long afterward a youth who bent over the fair form of a young girl in a mountain pass was startled by the sound of approaching hoofs.

Instantly catching up a revolver, he sprung up and started forward.

"Halt!" rung out as he stepped in front of the riders.

"Ther boy—Dandy Dave," said a voice.

"Shasta, thank Heaven!" was the reply.

What made Flash o' Lightning start when he looked into the pallid and beautiful face of Medea, whom Dandy Dave had lately rescued from the noose of a lot of red hangmen?

"By Jericho! I thought so!" exclaimed Shasta. "They ar' alike ez two peas from ther same pod."

For awhile the Girl Queen of Bowie and the Killer stared mutely into each other's face.

"It is Lillian—I am certain of it!" said Flash o' Lightning.

"No," said the girl; "I am Medea—Medea Comstock. Juan Dick must have lied."

"Show me your right arm—but why need I look? You have your mother's features."

Medea opened her sleeve and exposed to Flash o' Lightning's gaze an arm whose symmetry was faultless, and white as Parian marble.

"That proves it!" cried the Killer, pointing to a strange scar on the flesh. "Some person has tried to remove the tattoo mark, but they did not succeed."

"I recollect now! Years ago my guardian tried to remove a mark on my arm, because, he said, it was a disfigurement. But I cannot be your sister."

"I am willing to swear by the stars that you are Lillian St. Omer!" was the positive rejoinder. "I left you long ago in 'Frisco. Love of gold and adventure carried me to this country. We discovered Grizzly Gulch and its rich veins of gold, and just as I was going to send for you—a little child then—Captain Apollo and his demons came, and the vendetta began. How he discovered you, Heaven knows, Lillian."

"I left 'Frisco with him without much compulsion. My guardian said that men sought me because I stood between them and wealth and position."

"Ah! the old St. Omer estate, that is it!" cried Flash o' Lightning. "You stood between your guardian and it, Lillian. We will astonish somebody one of these days."

"But you are wounded."

"It is merely a scratch, since I have found you," was the answer. "Shasta, if Captain Apollo's ball was in my heart, it should not kill."

"Thet's ther kind o' grit thet brings a feller through," said Dandy Dave's protector.

"I'd like to go back to Bowie to finish with the rest of the fiends," continued Flash o' Lightning.

"Ther Injuns will do thet."

"What Injuns?"

"Ther ones I heard to-night huntin' fer ther man what wiped War Robe out. Never mind, pard, ther two gangs hev settled matters afore this."

Flash o' Lightning made no reply. He was gazing into Medea's face once more.

"Don't you see that Captain Apollo's bullet could not kill me?" smiled the Slayer, as he addressed the young girl who rode beside him through one of the lovely valleys traversed by the famous 'Frisco trail. "We are going back to the old city, Lillian, and when I return to work the mines of Grizzly and build a respectable city where Bowie stands, I will not be alone."

"I will come with you," she said. "I would love the Shasta country were it not for the wild men who inhabit it."

"I have been one of them. I acknowledge the compliment, sister, and," with a broader smile, "you have been Queen of Bowie."

"Queen for a season, and crownless now," and the girl's merry laugh rung far away.

Six months later a large party of hardy Californians entered Grizzly Gulch. The handsome man who appeared the leader of the band pointed out various objects of interest to those by whom he was surrounded, and his eye kindled with curiosity and eagerness as he went on.

Suddenly he reined in his horse and uttered an exclamation which reached the ears of many behind him.

"Why, there is no Bowie! Yonder is where it stood," and his outstretched hand described a desolate spot a few rods ahead.

"Jes' ez I expected, cap'n," said a voice at his elbow. "War Robe's red-skins didn't find ther man what wiped 'im out, but they found his pards."

"It looks that way, Shasta."

The scene on the site of Bowie City baffles description. Not a citizen of the once thriving place greeted the new invaders of Grizzly Gulch. Blackened ruins of log shanties, and bleached bones lay everywhere; the Blackfeet had taken a vengeance from which no white man had escaped to tell the tale.

Where the Nugget of famous memory had stood, rose a pole whose wooden arms were strung with dry scalps, and on the site of Shasta's cabin lay the bones of twenty men.

To-day a thriving mining-camp, known as Prosperity City stands where Bowie stood—where her dare-devil inhabitants fought and died.

The Skeleton Rider of the Lone Indian Trail has passed away, but Shasta, the ghost seer, still remains, and runs the Cherub's Rest—the first hotel of the new town.

Across a lot of names in a certain cave far above the bed of a canyon is carved the word "Avenged," and he whose hands forced it into the rock is known as Captain St. Omer—not as Flash o' Lightning any more.

Captain Apollo never knew the secret which Perfection Pete and Juan Dick's shrewdness had discovered; this was nothing less than the striking resemblance between the Killer and the Queen of Bowie. The cunning villains had correctly guessed the truth, but Juan Dick failed, Captain Apollo failed and the law of mountain vengeance was satisfied.

The white horse ridden by the skeleton of Dabbling Dan has been presented to the Medea of our romance. On the day he passed through Bowie he joined Flash o' Lightning beyond the town, having been guided to his master by a signal.

The days of the Vendetta were numbered at last.

Prosperity is to have a queen, as Bowie once had, but this time men will not plot and kill for her beauty, for she will be the wife of Dandy Dave—now known as David Boldly.

The whole camp is to turn out to the wedding, and mine host of Cherub's Rest is to regale the

thirsty with the "best throat-ile thet ever came over the 'Frisco trail, by Jericho!"

Where her bravery once saved Dandy Dave from the rope of a mob of human demons, may Lillian St. Omer be the happiest bride in California!

THE END.

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